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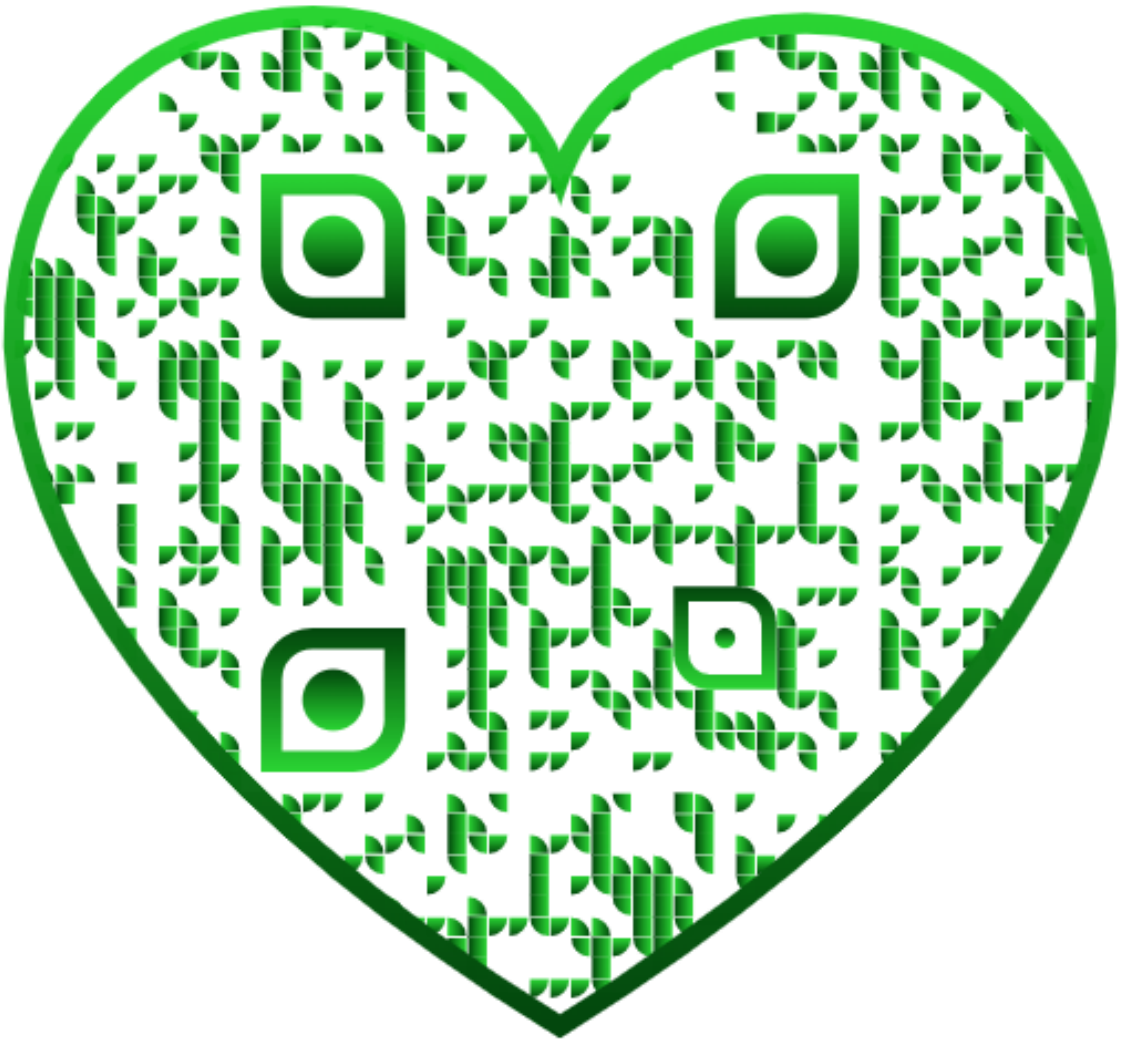

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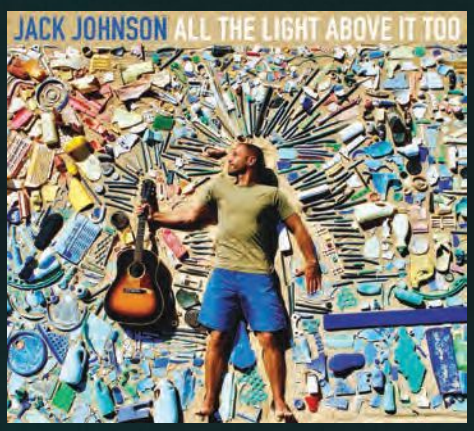

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V44 NO6

THE AFTERNOON WAS full of F-words.

The first of these was free coffee.

When Peter Shapiro and I arrived at Joe Russo's place in Brooklyn, we not only received a warm greeting, but also an iced beverage.

This small bit of consideration on a humid August afternoon—which, in an odd bit of kismet, also was Jerry Garcia's 75th birthday—set the tone for the conversation to follow.

I first encountered Joe Russo and Peter Shapiro at the very same place in the mid-'90s: Tribeca's storied Wetlands Preserve. I have fond memories of seeing both of them in action (Joe while on the stage with Fat Mama, Peter while everywhere with everything else).

Over the years, our lives intersected on numerous occasions, such as the Jammy Awards, where Joe took New Groove honors twice (in 2000 with Fat Mama and in 2005 with Benevento-Russo Duo) and performed a few times as well, including his debut appearance with Phil Lesh, as he explains in our cover story.

Of course, Joe and Peter have worked together in multiple settings since the Wetlands days. (If you're interested in (re) visiting that initial era, then check out my documentary, *Wetlands Preserved: The Story of An Activist Rock Club*.) Peter has welcomed Joe and friends to the Brooklyn Bowls, the Capitol Theatre, Lockn', Jazz & Colors at Central Park and beyond.

As a result of their longstanding relationship, Peter was eager to speak with Joe for his first-ever *Relix* publisher's interview.

Joe and Peter in the Russos' backyard

This is where the other F-words came in, the animating principles that keep both of them in motion. Over the course of the afternoon, I heard Joe and Peter circle back to three simple ideas that are at the heart of all they do: family, friendship and fun.

By way of example, here's what Joe had to say about the impact of JRAD's success on his daily life: "I really appreciate having time where I feel like I can take a breath, knowing that I'm going to be with my family, knowing that I'm going to be available to say yes if somebody calls me to do something cool—doing things where, maybe 10 years ago, I might have had to say no to because I had to work a restaurant gig to pay for my phone.

"It's been awesome to see my friends feel that way as well. Tommy [Hamilton] lived on my couch for a year and a half. We've all been there. I remember calling Tommy when I got the Furthur gig and I was like, 'I'm going to do everything in my power to make sure we all elevate.' Then, when Phil and Friends started coming back and we were doing a gig at Terrapin Crossroads, Jackie [Greene] and Anders [Osborne] both got food poisoning. It was early in the day, and Tommy was in LA, and I was like, 'Phil, please let me get Tommy up here to play.' He was like, 'Alright, if he can get here.' I called Tommy and I asked him: 'How fast can you drive?' His band members' faces when they showed up looked like they must have died about 30 times. But he came up and he killed it, and it felt so good to be like, 'Finally!' Then, we did this thing with Scott [Metzger] and Tommy that was outstanding and I was like, 'This is what I've been screaming about all of these years!'

"The other exciting thing has been watching Scott, Marco [Benevento] and Dave [Dreiwitz] go through what I went through, making the same discoveries I did. I remember Scott coming to me and saying, 'Dude, I love Bob Weir's songs.' It was awesome seeing someone like Scott—who's a fantastic musician, but also someone who I don't think naturally would have gone down that path—light up with excitement the way I first did. It was great to see that across the board with our band, sharing that later-in-life discovery. But to share it with my best pals and some of my favorite musicians in the world has been really exciting.

"And throughout it all, we've been trying to stay with that ethos of 'Are we having fun? Is everybody out there having fun?'"

I've heard similar sentiments from Peter over the years, which is why I think the two of them have maintained a special connection and also why it's such a treat to present their exchange of ideas in this issue of *Relix*.

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ON THE COVER

Michael DiDonna shot Joe Russo's Almost Dead in Port Chester, N.Y. on July 22, 2017.

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FEATURES

52 | Saints of Circumstance

After years of working the club circuit with projects like Fat Mama and the Duo, **Joe Russo** received an unexpected call to join Furthur during the summer of 2009. The Dead's music inspired him in a whole new way and, when he received an offer to play Brooklyn Bowl's annual Freaks Ball, Russo pulled together a few of his longtime friends for a one-off gig as **Joe Russo's Almost Dead**. Almost five years later, JRAD has grown from a whim to an amphitheater act and one of the most successful tribute groups on the festival circuit. *Relix* Publisher **Peter Shapiro** and Editor-in-Chief **Dean Budnick** recently sat down with Russo for an in-depth conversation that traces the drummer's ongoing efforts to deliver improvisation with a punk-rock aesthetic.

49 | Behind Sad Eyes

Grizzly Bear were heirs to the indie world's art-rock throne before they decided to take an unexpected break from the studio and blog world in general. During that five-year pause, the members of the quartet weathered a number of personal hardships and even moved from their longtime New York home to greener pastures. **Larson Sutton** spent time with the quartet in Los Angeles and learned how their recent break resulted in a fresh set of rules and a new appreciation for Pharrell's most optimistic song.

46 | High-Speed Introspection

After being primarily known as a hotbed of hip-hop and electronica, Philadelphia started nurturing a lo-fi leaning, psych-driven community of guitar-rock bands in the early-2000s. And, following more than a decade of hard work, **The War on Drugs** have emerged as major-label players, capable of bringing their scene's thoughtful musings and musical commitment to the main-stage masses. Editor-in-Chief **Mike Greenhaus** caught up with band principal **Adam Granduciel** as he prepared to release his Atlantic debut and learned why, despite his success, this thirty-something guitarist is still searching for a deeper understanding.

43 | Renegade Days Revisited

There's no question that **Steve Earle** is an outlaw musician, but, during the past few years, he's spent most of his creative energy on a number of other projects, both in and out of the musical world. After surviving another divorce and saying goodbye to an old friend, Earle has returned to his country roots for his latest LP, *So You Wannabe an Outlaw*. **Holly Gleason** offers an intimate look at the veteran songwriter as he enters the next phase of his career—single, sober and closer to his musician son.

40 | Back to the Garden

Portugal. The Man's list of stylistic influences reads like genre-specific tents at Bonnaroo—classic-rock anthems, hip-hop bangers, heady jams and authentic folk—but since coming together in the Alaskan wilderness, these indie-psych favorites have carefully crafted a style of their own. *Woodstock*, the now Portland, Ore.-based ensemble's first release in four years, is the group's most immediately accessible LP yet. It's also their most belabored, recorded over a years-long stretch with the likes of Danger Mouse, Mike D and John Hill. Editor-in-Chief **Mike Greenhaus** explains how these longtime friends have managed to pack a festival of sounds into a single-disc album.

Dino Perrucci (Phish)

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DEAR RELIX

Here's what readers are talking about online and offline

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Send your thoughts to letters@relix.com.

REMEMBERING THE MIDNIGHT RIDER

Gregg Allman passed away on May 27 due to complications from liver cancer. He was 69. In the days and weeks that followed, bandmates, friends and longtime associates honored the iconic musician, both onstage and online. Our August issue is loaded with thoughts and reflections from his Allman Brothers Band collaborators Jaimoe, Warren Haynes, Derek Trucks, Oteil Burbridge, Marc Quiñones, Chuck Leavell, Jack Pearson and Jimmy Herring, as well as others who shared the stage, studio and tour bus with Allman at one point in his life. Here, our readers offer their own tributes to the Midnight Rider.

Devastating. His vocals and organ playing were so soulful and amazing. The Allmans were one of my biggest music influences. It feels like the end of an era. Rest easy Gregg—no more roaming like a gypsy. Thank you for all the great music.

Jason via Jambands.com

I love when music touches one's soul. Gregg and Duane's music has always touched mine, and always will. RIP.

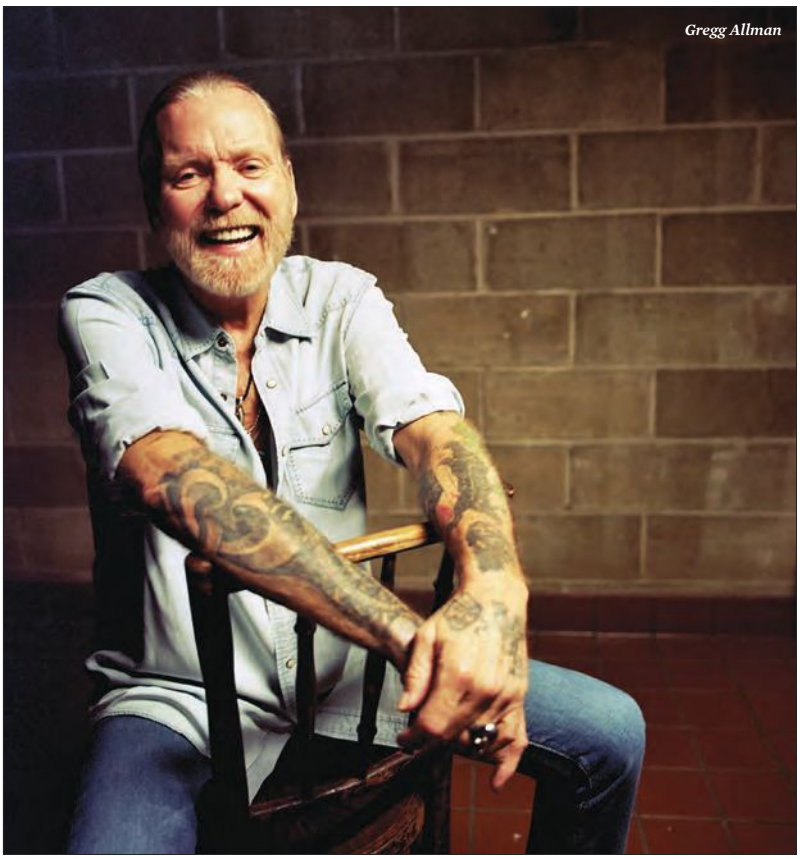
Charlie via Jambands.com

I was a preteen when my uncle hooked me up with a huge box of records. In there were *Eat a Peach* and *Brothers and Sisters*. I got hooked on them.

Larry Smith via Jambands.com

There are no words. His music is part of the fabric of my life.

Amanda via Relix.com



Gregg Allman

One of the most iconic rockers to ever grace our ears. You will always live on in the music. Rest easy.

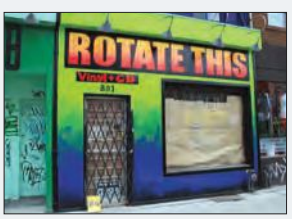
James via Relix.com

Founder and leader of one of the all-time greatest rock bands. Their legacy will live on forever.

Timmy via Jambands.com

CORRECTIONS:

■ Due to a production error, in our August 2017 issue, Stevie Nicks' name was spelled wrong in the subhead of Courtney Jayne's "My Page" essay, and the last line of Contributing Editor Richard B. Simon's *Long Strange Trip* review was cut off. We apologize and have posted the correct versions of both articles on Relix.com.



RECORD STORE PROFILE:
ROTATE THIS (TORONTO)

■ Toronto has long been a hotbed for 21st-century indie-rock bands, and Rotate This helped spur the vinyl resurgence that came along with that sonic revolution. But the store's owner Pierre Hallett remembers selling vinyl for 50 cents in his early days. Rotate This, which celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2016, opened shortly after Nirvana released their iconic *Nevermind* in 1991, and has continued to offer a mix of current and deep-crate selections. Hallett and his staff also have plenty of stories about famous customers over the years, including Prince and Quentin Tarantino.

IN MEMORIAM:
DEB SCHULER

The entire Relix Media Group is sad to report that Deb Schuler, our longtime production designer, passed way in early August after a heroic battle with cancer. As a principal at Red Herring Design, Deb has been part of the *Relix* family for over 13 years—connecting the dots between our design, editorial and advertising teams, coordinating with our printer and serving as a constant source of inspiration during countless late-night closings. We first met her in late 2003 through the Phish camp (Red Herring worked on *A Live One*) and Deb, Carol Bobolts and their staff were responsible for redesigning and laying out *Relix* for several years. Deb returned to *Relix* shortly after we launched Relix Media Group in 2009 and was a vital part of our creative team until she got sick. She also worked with us on some of our specialty publications like the annual Bonnaroo program. Deb was passionate about animals, music and art. Her positive attitude and sense of humor were infectious—and continue to guide how we interact with those around us.

INSTAPRINT:

■ U.K. rock duo Royal Blood had quite a summer. Not only did the band score their first chart-topping album, *How Did We Get So Dark?* but they also traveled around the world playing to one massive festival crowd after another. Fame clearly didn't go to their heads, however, and they still made time to meet up and take photos with fans—including Brad Pitt. "Congratulations to our competition winner William Bradley Pitt," the band (@royalblooduk) joked on Instagram.

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NEWPORT FOLK FESTIVAL

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JULY 28–30

BY DEAN BUDNICK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CAROLINE BUDNICK AND DEAN BUDNICK

As **Roger Waters** can attest, the **Newport Folk Festival** remains a destination event. Following a Saturday-night performance in Milwaukee, Waters hopped on a plane so that he could make it to Fort Adams State Park on Sunday to join **John Prine** for a single song during the festival's closing set.

Waters first appeared at Newport in 2015, backed by My Morning Jacket and Lucius vocalists **Jess Wolfe** and **Holly Laessig**, and he quickly established abiding relationships with the singing duo—Wolfe and Laessig are currently in Waters' touring band and returned with him for their own surprise appearance. Indeed, the range and caliber of artists who appeared unannounced at this year's event rivaled the official lineup: Bon Iver's **Justin Vernon**, **Nathaniel Rateliff & The Night Sweats**, **Margo Price**, The Lone Bellow's **Zach Williams**, **Shakey Graves**, **Charlie Sexton**, **Sharon Van Etten**, **Rayland Baxter**, **Hiss Golden Messenger**, **Natalie Prass**, **Phil Cook**, **Kyle Craft**, The Suffers' **Kam Franklin** and MMJ drummer **Patrick Hallahan**.

Such fealty to the fest is a product of the extraordinary efforts of founder **George Wein**. (The nonagenarian was on hand, as ever, making the rounds on his Wein Machine golf cart, and sitting on the stage during a stirring performance by **Rhiannon Giddens**.) Wein's legacy is now perpetuated by current Executive Producer **Jay Sweet**, who has helped to reinvigorate the festival, which once again sold out before a single artist announcement.

Sweet has helped a number of artists nuture their connection to the NFF through a musician advisory board that includes **Jim James**, who served as something of an ambassador at this year's event. In addition to his own slot, James sat in with Prine and **Angel Olsen**; he also appeared in a Chuck Berry tribute and shared vocal duties with **Nick Offerman** on Bob Dylans' "Masters of War" during the special "Speak Out" set on Sunday.

"Speak Out" was one of several standout collaborative performances at this year's

Jim James

The Avett Brothers

Rayland Baxter and Shakey Graves

Nathaniel Rateliff

event. On Saturday, Vernon and Hiss Golden Messenger offered a selection of Bill Withers covers during what had been billed solely as the **Grandma's Hands Band**. Vernon sang lead on "Ain't No Sunshine" and swapped verses with Phil Cook during "Lean on Me," while also welcoming Prass ("Lovely Day"), **Hurray for the Riff Raff**'s **Alynda Segarra** ("Grandma's Hands") and **Patterson Hood** ("I Can't Write Left-Handed"). On Sunday, "Chuck!" saw Sexton and the **Texas Gentlemen** perform a variety of songs by the late Chuck Berry, with guest singers including Franklin ("Roll Over Beethoven"), Graves ("Brown Eyed Handsome Man"), Rateliff ("You Never Can Tell"), Deer Tick's **Dennis Ryan** ("Run Rudolph Run") and James ("Promised Land").

Sweet introduced "Speak Out," a set billed as an opportunity "to celebrate an artist's freedom to write songs that reflect the times in which he/she lives." The core players—including members of The Decemberists, My Morning Jacket and the **Preservation Hall Jazz Band**—delivered such songs as "Heroes" with Craft, "Why We Build the Wall" with **Billy Bragg**, "I Am a Patriot" with Williams, "Working Class Hero" with Price, "O-o-h Child" with Lucius' singers and the **Berklee Gospel & Roots Choir**, "Black Boys on Mopeds" with Van Etten and "Fortunate Son" with Rateliff.

Newport featured a number of standout officially announced performances as well, including **Fleet Foxes**, **Regina Spektor**, **Alone and Together**, **Carl Broemel** and **Shovels & Rope** on Friday; **The Avett Brothers**, **Wilco**, **Billy Bragg & Joe Henry**, **Offa Rex** (the collaboration between Olivia Chaney and The Decemberists) and **Drive-By Truckers** on Saturday; and **American Acoustic** (featuring **Punch Brothers** and **I'm With Her**), **Margaret Glaspy**, **Michael Kiwanuka**, **Steelism** and **Whitney** on Sunday.

The festival closed with a headlining set by Newport veteran and musician's musician John Prine, whose performance turned into something of a hootenanny when he was joined, at various moments, by Waters, Vernon, James, Price and Rateliff. Their collaborative take on Prine's storied, Americana catalog embodied the essence of an event that is steeped proudly in tradition, even as it steps confidently into the present day.

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Soundcheck

LIVE REVIEWS AND NEWS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE *Compiled by* DEAN BUDNICK

My Morning Jacket's Merriweather "Victory Dance"

Sean O'Brien

MY MORNING JACKET

MERRIWEATHER POST PAVILION
COLUMBIA, MD.
JULY 14

At first, it seemed like the show might be over before it began but, in the end, the threatening forecasts and dark skies created a palpable tension that supercharged the atmosphere in the woodsy Maryland amphitheater. Like clockwork, cooler temps and clear skies prevailed when **Gary Clark Jr.** took the stage for the evening's support spot. The historic venue then filled in and a painterly midsummer scene developed in this suburban alcove.

The first quarter of **My Morning Jacket**'s headlining set drew on a familiar rotation of material released during the latter half of the group's 19-year career. Draped in gadgetry, **Jim James** took the mic and gained the audience's rapt attention by blasting off with the triumphant "Victory Dance," a tune that felt tailored for a summer shed concert's opening slot. Then, they offered the rare "Picture of You" and, in this live setting, the evocative *The Tennessee Fire* gem expanded far beyond its original framework and was one of the night's highlights.

"State of the Art (A.E.I.O.U.)" gave Merriweather Post Pavilion the fleeting vibe of a tent revival. For those not looking at their phones, it was downright enticing, with James singing: "I use my state of the art technology/ Now don't you forget it/ It ain't usin' me."

The always-gargantuan Southern-rock romp "Lay Low" received a proper classic-rock

treatment. **Carl Broemel** and James' signature, guitar-infused brawn and Allmans-esque interplay frenzied the pit and awakened the headbangers in attendance. Few tunes encapsulate the MMJ live experience better than "Lay Low" and the mid-set placement provided the perfect fulcrum for the show. The outfit reached the height of their powers during a scintillating, 13-minute set-closing performance of "Phone Went West." This exploration produced a lengthy segment filled with strident experimentation on both vocal and instrumental fronts.

The encore sequence opened with the psych-soul favorite "Wordless Chorus" and moved into a few *Evil Urges* highlights. A brooding "Touch Me I'm Going to Scream Pt. 2" brought the 2008 album's disco-synth-funk sound to the forefront. Boasting a magnetic, gyrating, out-of-body performance by James, this positively earth-moving jam segment vibrated and washed the entirety of the vast space in light and sound. The animated psych soul of "Highly Suspicious" came next, before MMJ rounded out the night with two consecutive high-octane rock-and-roll tunes, "Mahgeetah" and "One Big Holiday," blasting off a segment that was filled with guitar crunch and grandstanding around **Patrick Hallahan**'s drum kit. With the ending of "Run Thru" sandwiched in between for good measure, the frequent closers revved up the DMV-area crowd and sent them off to their respective towns and cities "feeling good and limber." ***Wesley Hodges***

U2 return home

U2

CROKE PARK
DUBLIN, IRELAND
JULY 22

If you hate **U2**, then hell on earth would have been central Dublin in the days before the band's massive hometown stadium gig in July. The hotels had been booked solid for months, bootleggers were hawking tour shirts on street corners and multiple U2 swap meets were happening in Temple Bar, where fans from around the world packed pubs and shouted out the hits, arm-in-arm with friends and strangers. So when those hundreds, maybe thousands, of foreigners finally found themselves among the 78,000-plus assembled at Croke Park, they were expecting more than a traditional rock show.

And they weren't disappointed. While the setlist and production mirrored the outfit's American tour, the emotional difference was immediate. As they've done each night on this run marking the 30th anniversary of *The Joshua Tree*, U2 played the album in its entirety, but started with four hits predating that juggernaut—all performed on a small, Joshua Tree-shaped stage near the center of the stadium. First up was "Sunday Bloody Sunday." Yet, it was after the melodic intro, after the first chorus, when the chords turn jagged and **The Edge** started swinging his telecaster side to side that it became obvious to everyone that it was a special night. As the venue was ignited, the mass on the field started pogoing, arms raised, while those in the lower and upper bowls shouted out every word.

More on par with what you might see at a South American festival or stadium gig, the exuberance and sheer love quickly eclipsed what U2 was experiencing in the States earlier this year. "Is it OK to say that we have a prayer for tonight?" **Bono** asked, in between "New Year's Day" and "Bad" (songs No. 2 & 3). "Our prayer is that we have one of those epic nights of rock-and-roll that none of us can forget, holding on to some things even tighter, and letting other things go."

Indeed, emotions were running high, and the connection fans have to *The Joshua Tree* is deep. As U2 made its way through the album's second side, after "One Tree Hill," a song of loss, tears were streaking down the cheeks of the middle-aged parents in attendance. Meanwhile, smiling cops gathered for selfies, capturing not just U2 behind them, but the stunning production: a football field-shaped screen bearing 8K videos filmed by longtime collaborator **Anton Corbjin**. Bono personalized the gig in between songs, mentioning the band's families, friends and road crew and even pushing for Croke Park to host the World Cup.

What began in daylight with a stadium full of people singing Oasis hits—courtesy of **Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds**—ended with those voices going hoarse to a cluster of post-*Joshua Tree* anthems like "Elevation," "Vertigo" and "One." The gig's lasting memory—that something special—came relatively early, toward the climax of "Where the Streets Have No Name," when four jets roared over the stadium as the sun was setting, spraying the colors of the Irish flag behind them. It was indeed memorable. ***Wes Orshoski***

Wes Orshoski

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MELVIN SEALS AND JGB

CRYSTAL BAY CASINO AND SPA, CROWN ROOM STATELINE, NEV. JULY 15

Melvin Seals and JGB aren't strangers to Northern Nevada jamband fanatics. Fresh off a collaborative performance at the nearby High Sierra Music Festival, the longtime Jerry Garcia keyboardist looped back to the region for a more intimate performance at the Crystal Bay Casino's Crown Room.

Taking his seat onstage, a smiling Seals set the mood with an instrumental "Finders Keepers" romp dripping with funk and wah-wah, before backing vocalists **Shirley Starks** and **Cheryl Rucker** emerged and quickly rallied the Deadheads who were still working the casino on the other side of the venue's doors. JGB have cycled through a number of singer/guitarists over the years and **Zach Nugent**, who recently completed his first year of duty, proved his command of the material early on during a 21-minute mash-up of "Scarlet Begonias" and Smoky Robinson's "The Way You Do the Things You Do." Garcia's distinct tonal structures emanated from Nugent's "Tiger" replica, and bobbed on top of the deep ocean swell of Seals' organ in an oft-visited combination throughout the evening.

The ensemble brought the mood back down a bit for a reflective "Twilight," featuring buttery licks from Seals, before they sped things up again with the funky "People Say" and a reggae, Dead-infused take on Bob Dylan's "Knockin' on Heaven's Door." The crowd delighted in the swaying rhythms and echoed the chorus before Nugent mixed in a lengthy solo, steadily backed by bassist **John-Paul McLean** and drummer **Pete Lavezzoli**. Seals wrapped-up the 12-and-a-half minute version with a choice solo, building to a crescendo before a last sing-along verse. With the 40th anniversary of Elvis Presley's death approaching, the ensemble then paid tribute with a cavorting, blues-picking "That's Alright." "Mission in the Rain" followed, featuring solid vocals from Nugent coupled as Starks and Rucker added their beautiful harmonies.

The set came to a close with a rollicking "Midnight Moonlight," with Seals' staccato organ notes adding some instrumental punch. After a bit of coaxing from the crowd for one more, they broke out Dorsey Burnette's uplifting gospel tune "Magnificent Sanctuary Band," a song that Garcia recorded but never actually played live, before Seals, ever the community leader, made his way to merch table to greet his fans.

Michael Smyth

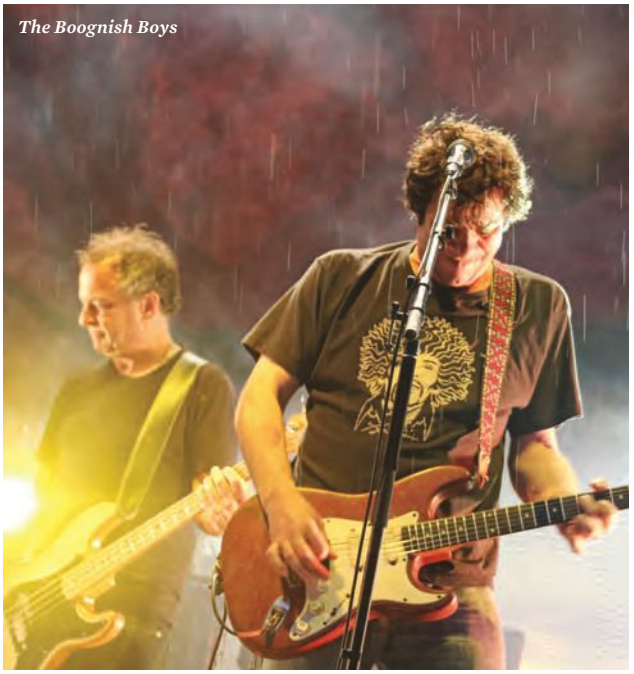
WEEN

RED ROCKS AMPHITHEATRE MORRISON, COLO. JULY 12

Ever since **Ween** used Colorado as the backdrop for their reunion shows in early 2016, the Denver-Boulder area has grown into something of a sacred ground for their Boognish fanbase. So it wasn't surprising that the group's first show at the iconic Red

The keeper of Garcia's flame

Michael Smyth



The Boognish Boys

Jennifer Lee Baniszewski

Rocks Amphitheatre since 2009 was a raucous, 34-song marathon, mixing fan favorites, a bit of storytelling and even a debut cover of Led Zeppelin's "Kashmir."

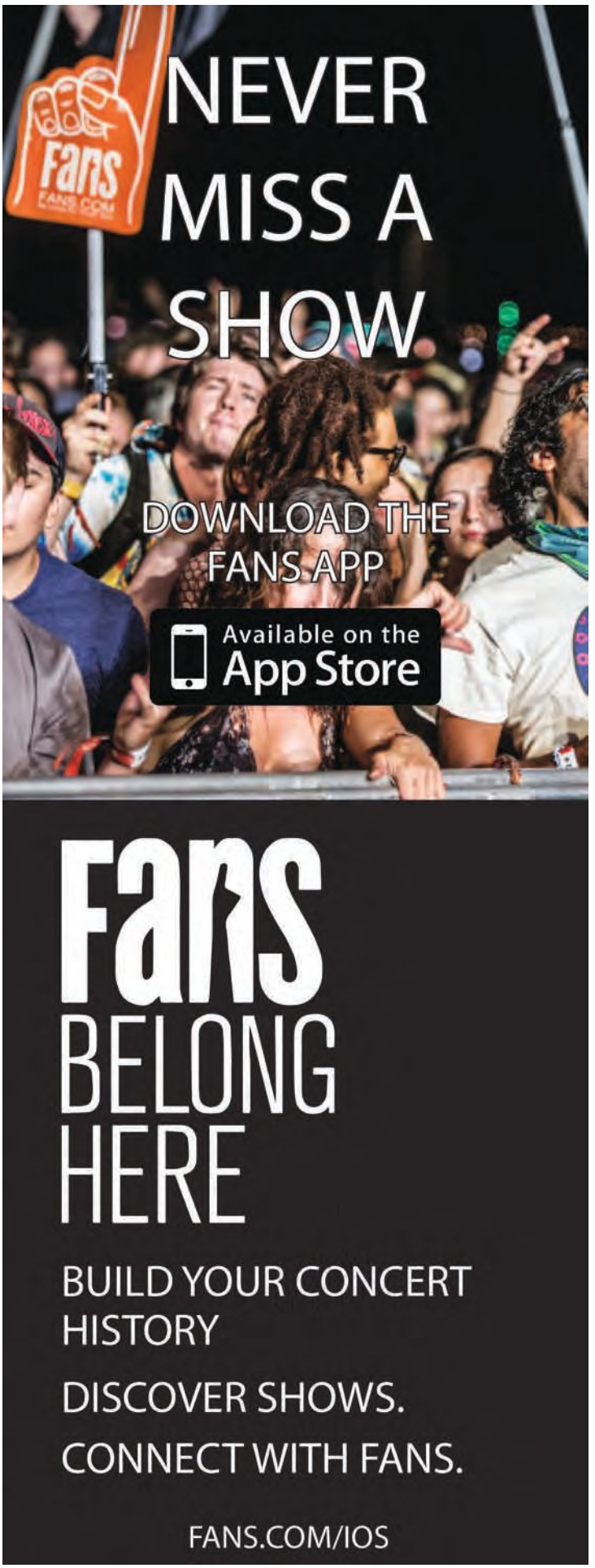
Despite some rain, the New Hope, Pa.-bred quintet found their groove early on with a barefoot **Mickey Melchiondo** delivering a choice guitar solo during "The Golden Eel" as he rocked alongside bassist **Dave Dreiwitz**. Frontman **Aaron Freeman** has honed his own signature guitar style over the years too, and he showcased his skills during the show's bridge. In celebration of *The Mollusk*'s 20th anniversary, the group offered six of the 14 songs that comprise that classic record. "She Wanted to Leave," arguably Ween's saddest tune, offset the album's mostly upbeat selections and the noise rock of "The Stallion Part 1"—the change in tempo arrived just as the rain started to pack a serious punch.

Ween nodded to the inclement weather by teasing Neil Young's "Like a Hurricane" during "Cold Blows the Wind," while tracks like "Waving My Dick in the Wind, "You Fucked Up," "Buckingham Green" and "Frank" rallied the crowd despite the difficult conditions. Melchiondo treated the soggy crowd to a history lesson between "Spinal Meningitis (Got Me Down)" and "The H.I.V. Song," explaining that they first played "Spinal Meningitis" 22 years ago while opening for Freedy Johnston and area heroes Big Head Todd and the Monsters.

"Big Head Todd asked that we play first before anyone got there. So, we said, 'Fuck you, Big Head Todd!' and we played 'Spinal Meningitis' for like 20 minutes. So now it's just pre-associated. No offense, Todd." The whole place cheered and laughed while the band lit up a smoke and went into "The H.I.V. Song," an unsuspecting singalong given the title.

"Let's just do it," Melchiondo suggested next. "Let's just do our big number." Freeman thanked the crowd and they dove into a somewhat rocky, but rockin' "Kashmir" that took everyone by surprise. Without having to change any lyrics, Freeman's signature high-pitched croon described the entire evening in Robert Plant's words: "All I see turns to brown/ As the sun burns the ground."

Kelley Lauginiger



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A not-so-miserable night with Elvis Costello

ELVIS COSTELLO & THE IMPOSTERS

PROVIDENCE PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
PROVIDENCE, R.I.
JULY 25

"I hate to break it to you, but not *all* the songs are going to be miserable."

Elvis Costello made this wry promise to a respectful Rhode Island audience in the early moments of the final show on his Imperial Bedroom & Other Chambers tour.

The Providence Performing Arts Center, a lavish, art-deco theater which opened in 1928 and most commonly hosts Broadway touring companies, proved to be an ideal setting for Costello to revisit *Imperial Bedroom*, his lush, nuanced 1982 album of heartache. A hushed audience remained seated throughout most of the 32 songs, held at rapt attention while Costello and **The Imposters** made the most of the venue's acoustics (following a brief adjustment at the outset, to clear up a slightly muddy mix).

Two of Costello's bandmates were intimately familiar with the material, as keyboard player **Steve Nieve** and drummer **Pete Thomas** had originally joined Costello in the studio for the *Imperial Bedroom* sessions (while "the new guy," bassist **Davey Faragher** has been an Imposter since 2001). On this tour, the quartet has been augmented by vocalists **Kitten Kuroi** and **Briana Lee**, who added a richness to the *Imperial Bedroom* material but also sweetened such other selections as "Everyday I Write the Book" and the version of "Alison" that opened the 15-song encore, with Costello, Kuroi and Lee performing as a trio, harmonizing around a lone microphone.

While the show commenced with *Imperial Bedroom*'s "The Loved Ones," which appears halfway through the LP, Costello did not bind himself to performing the totality of the record in order. He visited other "chambers" during the set, including the introductory tunes from Costello's debut record, *My Aim Is True* ("Welcome to the Working Week" and "Miracle Man") as well as a pair from *Armed Forces* ("Moods for Moderns" and "Green Shirt").

The show also featured some accompanying art projected behind the band, beginning with *Imperial Bedroom*'s iconic cover. (Costello shared an amusing account of his quizzical reaction after seeing Barney Bubbles' painting inspired by the music.) The images also included variations on Costello's other album covers, created in a similar style, while the screens showed a collection of film-noir posters during "Watching the Detectives."

The set culminated with an expanded, revelatory take on *Bedroom*'s "Pidgin English" (which, along with "Shabby Doll," provided two of the highlights from the record). It then gave way to the extended encore that soon found Costello moving behind the piano for a few selections with the vocalists. (He even previewed two numbers from his forthcoming musical, *A Face In The Crowd*). At other points, Costello gave the Steinway over to Nieve for a couple tunes as a duo (most notably a reading of *Imperial Bedroom*'s "Boy With a Problem," the one song on the record with lyrics by someone else—Squeeze's Chris Difford—which necessitated Costello's use of a lyric sheet).

After showing a heartfelt yet restrained response to the proceedings, the crowd finally burst out of their seats during "Everyday I Write the Book" streaming down the aisles to the front of the stage, lending a club vibe to this song and the final two offerings: "Pump It Up" and "(What's So Funny 'Bout) Peace, Love and Understanding."

All told, while *Imperial Bedroom* is an album of anguish, it facilitated an evening of joy.

Dean Budnick

WHEELS OF SOUL TOUR: TEDESCHI TRUCKS BAND, THE WOOD BROTHERS AND HOT TUNA

KETTLEHOUSE AMPHITHEATER
BONNER, MONT.
AUGUST 2

By the time **Tedeschi Trucks Band** reached Montana's newly opened Kettlehouse Amphitheater outside of Missoula, an intimate venue nestled on the banks of the Clark Fork River, their annual Wheels of Soul summer tour had grown into a fully gelled summer revue.

To the dismay of the line of concertgoers still edging toward the entrance, the evening's first act, **Hot Tuna,** started ahead of schedule, and their raucous sound rose over the amphitheater walls to tease the people still outside. Once within, however, the crowd was treated to an electrifying set from the power trio, whose vitality and nuance were broadcast through a top-notch sound system. Soon after, **The Wood Brothers** ran through their catalog gracefully, touching on foot stompers and ballads and inviting **Susan Tedeschi** up for one song. But it was bassist **Chris Wood**'s loose-hipped dance moves near the end of the set that stole the show, as brother **Oliver** dug dirty blues notes out of his guitar and drummer **Jano Rix** held down the rhythm with his feet while simultaneously playing keys.

As darkness fell, TTB tore into their set with a fury. While **Derek Trucks** took most of the guitar glory, Tedeschi found plenty of chances to display her own six-string charms, peeling off a biting solo during "Don't Know What It Means" before veering into a freeform jazz expedition led by saxophonist **Kebbi Williams**. Covers and guests dotted the setlist; Hot Tuna joined in to interpret material by Elmore James and Jefferson Airplane and The Wood Brothers lent their chops to Paul McCartney's "Let Me Roll It."

The band was in top form after a summer on the road. Tedeschi let out unhinged blues wails and Trucks made his guitar sing right along with her. During the set closer "The Storm," most of the band dropped out while he enraptured the audience with licks before the group rejoined him for an outro transition into The Allman Brothers' "Whipping Post." All three groups came together for the encore, segueing "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" into "Bound for Glory" and ending with The Rolling Stones' "Sweet Virginia." It climaxed with trombonist **Elizabeth Lea** blasting a solo up to the heavens.

Jed Nussbaum

This wheel's on fire: The closing night of TTB's multi-band tour

Dean Budnick (Elvis Costello) Neubauer Media (Tedeschi Trucks Band)

Phish's current favorites, Fleet Foxes

Bill Kelly

FLEET FOXES

PROSPECT PARK BANDSHELL
BROOKLYN, N.Y.
AUGUST 2

Fleet Foxes already had a good bit of momentum as they rolled into their two-night Brooklyn run—both an excellent new album and a rush of live energy behind their first major activity since embarking on a multi-year hiatus in 2012. And despite the lofty expectations that come with such a long-awaited release, the Seattle-based indie darlings seemed as loose and confident as ever, closing out with a thrilling night two.

Before the band even appeared on the Prospect Park Bandshell stage, their accompanying horn quartet emerged for their own opening tune—a tight and melodic composition that frontman **Robin Pecknold** later said made him feel "like a king." Then, the singer and his bandmates joined the horns for their proper introduction, "I Am All That I Need/Arroyo Seco/Thumbprint Scar," the same track that kicks off the band's new album *Crack-Up*. It is also a showcase for Pecknold's seldom-used lower register before the invocation explodes into the kind of harmony-laden, acoustic-guitar-driven number for which Fleet Foxes have been known since their meteoric rise almost a decade ago.

Pecknold and company's studio work is so precise and encompassing that it's easy to think that he and his band would find it difficult to recreate that magic in a live setting. But the songwriter's voice is just as crisp and emotive onstage as on his records, and the band's harmonies and musical intermingling are just as rich.

After continuing the night with the next two tracks off *Crack-Up*, Fleet Foxes reached back to their previous album for the driving "Grown Ocean." Pecknold took advantage of the break in the action—as the horns left the stage for a bit—to welcome the Brooklyn crowd and thank the weather, which had prompted a flash-flood warning in the area earlier that day but cleared up just in time for the concert. Bantering with a fan in the crowd, Pecknold promised that the following song had some "tasty licks" in it and played a riff from their debut-album classic "Ragged Wood."

The outfit continued to showcase their expertly crafted vocals on "Your Protector" before running through the gentle instrumental "The Cascades" and diving into "Mearcstapa," letting the song take them and the horn quartet into a jolting and spacey extended groove.

Near the closing stretch of the night, Pecknold took center stage with just his voice and acoustic guitar for a beautiful solo rendition of "Tiger Mountain Peasant Song" that featured a space-travel projection on the screen behind him and was followed by a duet with his pianist on the touching "If You Need to, Keep Time on Me."

The band returned, and the singer led the way into a run of Fleet Foxes most-beloved tunes, "Mykonos," which was taken at a quicker, rockier pace than the studio version, and "White Winter Hymnal," which was visually enhanced by projections of snowy peaks.

After teasing the crowd with an intro to The Beatles' "Here Comes the Sun," Pecknold dropped into the *Crack-Up* standout "Third of May / Ōdaigahara" before highlighting the understated melody in "The Shrine / An Argument" with one of his signature vocal blasts. The set closed out with tracks from each of their first two albums—the mysterious "Blue Ridge Mountains" and the pastoral "Helplessness Blues."

Returning to the stage for a two-song encore, Pecknold continued his light-hearted banter with the audience, responding to a shouted question about Phish covering his song at Madison Square Garden the previous week. And with a soaring "Oliver James"—helped along by the rhythmically clapping crowd—and the horn-assisted, ethereal finale of "Crack-Up," Fleet Foxes rounded out a night that more than proved that the band's hiatus left very little rust on their impeccable live show.

Matt Inman

GOGOL BORDELLO

Eugene Hütz and his band of gypsies return after a four-year studio break with another album of thought-provoking, 16TH-century Romani freak-out anthems. *By* **MATT INMAN**

WHEN EUGENE HÜTZ arrived in the United States under less than ideal circumstances, he didn't waste any time using the experience to expand his musical horizons. The first day that he and his family were placed in refugee housing in Burlington, Vt., the teenage Ukrainian and future frontman for Gogol Bordello took a walk that would end up changing his life.

"As soon as I arrived to Vermont, I walked out on the porch of the small wooden house and saw something that looked like Kingston, Jamaica," Hütz says, describing the "run-down and beat-up" appearance of his new surroundings. The musician, who had formed a band and already released two albums back in Ukraine, then stumbled upon some new friends.

"I saw just right over the fence, two Rastafarian guys," Hütz continues. "Two Jamaican guys with full on dreadlocks—something I only saw in pictures before. I saw three of them lighting up a spliff, and they invited me to share this with them. It was very strong—nothing that I was prepared for—but 10 minutes later, I was upstairs in Paul's apartment listening to reggae."

Paul, a DJ who became a lifelong friend of Hütz's, introduced him to a swath of Anglo-American punk-rock acts that Hütz had never encountered before—The Fall, Gang of Four, Black Flag and, maybe most important, Fugazi, who Hütz ended up seeing multiple times in Vermont. Their music, he says, made him feel at home after the move to a new country. "I was like, 'It's going to be alright,'" he says. From there, Hütz fell in with a crowd that was into New York and D.C. hardcore—Gorilla Biscuits, Cro-Mags, Bad Brains—and, as he puts it, he

"heard that music nonstop for the next two years. All of it."

Flash-forward to the present and Hütz is sitting in *Relix*'s New York offices. For the past 18 years, he's led the multi-national New York-based gypsy punks, Gogol Bordello, whose first record in four years, *Seekers and Finders* dropped in late August. Harkening back to those early days of discovering his passion for outsider American music, Hütz and his band recorded the album at what he calls "two very meaningful places."

The first side of the album, *Seekers*, was tracked in New York City at the Beastie Boys' Oscilloscope Studio, while the *Finders* side of the record was created outside Washington, D.C., at the Inner Ear studio where Fugazi recorded their own albums. "We find ourselves to be in a kindred-spirit league with those guys," Hütz says. He calls Beastie Boys' sound "bonanzatronic," and explains that he's met the members of Fugazi and befriended Ian MacKaye, who even stopped by Gogol's recording sessions for "a cup of tea and some noise."

"It's high-energy. It's storytelling. It's expressive on all topics," Hütz says of those two bands' aesthetic—though he could just as easily be talking about his own work. "So it works for us—I never wanted to record at blank-space studios that have no history."

Seekers and Finders, Gogol's first self-produced effort in years, is also a return to the approach Hütz once employed in the Ukraine. The impetus for taking over behind the boards—after working with what Hütz calls "senseis" of producing like Steve Albini, Rick Rubin and Andrew Scheps—was, in part, how personal these songs felt to him.

"I just felt like I had to get back behind the wheel, like I did in the Ukraine," Hütz says. "We made guitars with our own hands and took trains outside of town to borrow this guy's amplifier. We took all these trips to compile it all and then, by the time you hit the record button, you're already, like, having an orgasm. It was that incredible. So I wanted to do it in that kind of atmosphere, with full engagement. I felt like it's time to revisit that feeling, just for my own evolution. And, surely enough, it was a motherfucker. I forgot how much fucking work it is. I barely fucking finished it."

Gogol Bordello have always embraced the gypsy ethos, the wanderlust-soaked, home-is-where-you-hang-your-hat way of living. Hütz himself didn't grow up with these principles, and instead sought out knowledge of his Romani heritage—which he says was intentionally obscured when he was young in the Ukraine—later in life, as partially documented by the 2007 film *The Pied Piper of Hützovina*. Hütz laughs when he explains that the Romani people he knows around the world, who are largely settled with businesses, make fun of him for being "the only one freaking out there like some guy in the 16TH century, constantly on the road."

Hütz still feels at home on the move, though, and he says that his own varied experiences are what fuel his creativity and music the most—an approach he believes is going by the wayside these days.

"I think the value of experience-driven art and storytelling is increasing," he says. "Because we are finding ourselves in the time when people think music is made inside of an iPhone. So the idea of experience is completely shifted. And that works out up until people are forced to climb a tree and they realize they can only climb a tree with a joystick in their hand and a screen. So my music is for people who climb trees, worldwide—or at least would *like* to climb a tree."

LUCKY 13

Phish managed to pull off a historic, repeat-free Baker's Dozen residency—and may have redefined their modern legacy in the process.

By **RAFFAELA KENNY-CINCOTTA**

PHISH'S BAKER'S Dozen stand at New York's Madison Square Garden was a historic event across the board—for the band, for their fans and for the venue, who enshrined The Vermont Quartet with a banner on the run's final night. As Jon Fishman pointed out during the residency's penultimate show, they'd been toying with the Baker's Dozen idea for two decades and, though once deemed economically and musically unfeasible, Phish pulled off a stunt that managed to reenergize their always analytical fanbase: 13 shows, 26 sets, 237 songs, no repeats.

Whereas some bands slow down with age, with the Baker's Dozen Phish found a new way to excite and ignite their audience. They busted out long-forgotten cover tunes, introduced new, wild song interpretations that fit most night's donut themes, and even worked a number of side-project selections and once-forgotten studio experiments into the live Phish catalog.

Throughout, Phish also reminded fans new and old that, 34 years into their career, they are still capable of crafting classic, open-ended jams and, when given the time and space to get comfortable, they are the most creative touring act of their day. While only time will tell how the Baker's Dozen impacts Phish's next phase, here's a look at what went down during their celebrated 13-night run.

7/21
COCONUT DONUT
"Coconuts and chloroform..."

NOTABLE JAMS: "Tweezer"> "Seven Below" and "Everything's Right"> "Slave to the Traffic Light"> "Suzy Greenberg"
DEBUTS: Junior Senior's "Shake Your Coconuts;" Harry Nilsson's "Coconut"
BUSTOUTS: "Pigtail," last performed on July 9, 2016 (39 shows); David Bowie's "Moonage Daydream," last performed on Oct. 31, 2016 (13 shows, second performance ever)
RECAP: The energy in Madison Square Garden was palpable as the lights went down on night one of the Baker's Dozen. A "Shake Your Coconuts" debut fit the show's theme, but it was the back-to-back performances of "Reba," "Moonage Daydream" and "Walls of the Cave" that put the eager audience into a frenzied state. Clearly, Phish had a game plan when they rolled into MSG; a just-as-strong set two opened with an amped-up "Tweezer"> "Seven Below" jam. Later, they wrapped things up neatly with an a cappella debut of Harry Nilsson's "Coconut" and a final encore of Led Zeppelin's "Good Times Bad Times."

7/22
STRAWBERRY DONUT
"Strawberry fields forever..."

NOTABLE JAMS: "Split Open and Melt"> "Down With Disease (Reprise)"> "Shine a Light"
DEBUTS: The Beatles' "Strawberry Fields Forever" (a cappella); Shuggie Otis' "Strawberry Letter 23"
BUSTOUTS: "All of These Dreams," last played on Oct. 26, 2010 (251 shows)
RECAP: Night two's theme was strawberry, but "Down With Disease" was the real star. The Phish mainstay opened the second set, and then segued into a debut of "Strawberry Number 23." Fans thought "Disease" would go unfinished but it was eventually completed after a rocking "Split Open and Melt." This initial rehashing of the *Hoist* staple would foreshadow a slew of reprises throughout the Baker's Dozen. Later, Phish served up a helping of Frank Zappa and Talking Heads ("Peaches En Regalia"> "Cities") before ending the night with a joyous "My Sweet One." "Peaches" tied up a loose end, too, as Otis actually played bass on the classic Zappa track.

Bill Kelly

7/23
RED VELVET DONUT
"I've been wading in the velvet sea..."

NOTABLE JAMS: "Theme From the Bottom"> "It's Ice"> "More" and "Wolfman's Brother"> "Twist"
DEBUTS: The Velvet Underground's "Sunday Morning"
BUSTOUTS: The Velvet Underground's "Sweet Jane," last played on June 29, 2012 (193 shows)
RECAP: For Red Velvet night, lighting designer Chris Kuroda bathed Madison Square Garden in red light and the group dotted the setlist with Velvet Underground songs.
The evening's best gag arrived early. As Trey Anastasio slid behind the drum kit, Fishman emerged in full Catholic regalia—complete with holy water—to bless his crowd while singing The Velvet Underground's "Sunday Morning."

7/25
JAM-FILLED DONUT
"We're jammin'... I want to jam it with you..."

NOTABLE JAMS: "Lawn Boy" and "Crosseyed and Painless"
DEBUTS: "End of Session" (recorded for 1998's *Story of the Ghost* and never performed live)
RECAP: It was clear from the first few notes of "Sample in a Jar," traditionally one of Phish's most tightly woven songs, that they were going to fully embrace the evening's jam theme. And, in turn, the group pulled off many fans' dreams, offering a five-song first set and a seven-song second set that showed their ability to stretch seemingly every song into the ether. Their 30-minute "Lawn Boy" (including a show-ending reprise) will potentially go down as one of Phish's greatest improvisational moments. If some jaded fans were on the fence about Phish's ability to make it through 13 shows without repeats, then the psychedelic "Crosseyed and Painless" and an appearance of the deep cut "End of Session" immediately proved naysayers wrong and set things into overdrive.

7/26
POWDERED DONUT
"Shelter me from the powder and the finger..."

NOTABLE JAMS: "Tube" and "Carini"> "Mr. Completely"> "1999"
DEBUTS: Fleet Foxes' "White Winter Hymnal" (a cappella); Neil Young's "Powderfinger"
BUSTOUTS: Prince's "1999," last played on Dec. 31, 1998 (524 shows); "Pebbles and Marbles," last played on Aug. 3, 2014 (106 shows)
RECAP: While the unexpected a cappella Fleet Foxes cover scored Phish some credibility in indie-rock circles that often overlook the band, it was their decision to revive Prince's "1999" as a funk-jam vehicle after nearly 20 years that really excited the crowd. The now seldom-played, tender composition "Pebbles and Marbles" and a debut cover of Neil Young's grungy "Powderfinger" also displayed the band's sonic dexterity.

7/28
DOUBLE CHOCOLATE DONUT
"Have a chocolate donut and catch your breath..."

NOTABLE JAMS: "Chalk Dust Torture" and "You Sexy Thing"> "Mercury"> "You Sexy Thing"
DEBUTS: Tay Zonday's "Chocolate Rain" (a cappella); Hot Chocolate's "You Sexy Thing"
BUSTOUTS: "Weigh," last played on Aug. 9, 2015 (74 shows); "The Oh Kee Pah Ceremony," previously never played at MSG; "Destiny Unbound," previously never played at MSG
RECAP: Phish turned up the disco vibes on Double Chocolate Night by

Dino Perrucci

debuting Hot Chocolate's "You Sexy Thing" and then tossing in a mid-song "Mercury" for good measure. Earlier, the band showed off their bathroom humor with an a cappella version of the viral hit "Chocolate Rain" as well as a rocking "Ass Handed." They closed the night with a lyrically adapted "Fee"–many longtime fans' introduction to Phish–and their a cappella version of "Space Oddity."

7/29
CINNAMON DONUT
"Chasing the moonlight, my cinnamon girl..."

NOTABLE JAMS: "Blaze On" and "Alumni Blues"> "Letter to Jimmy Page"> "Alumni Blues"
BUSTOUTS: Neil Young's "Cinnamon Girl," last played on July 31, 1997 (629 shows)
RECAP: Saturday shows are always a party, and this night was no different. A raucous set one led into a stretched out "Blaze On" that lasted upward of 23 minutes. It also had adapted lyrics to fit the ongoing donut theme. ("You got one life, glaze on!") A cover of "I Am the Walrus" and a jammed out "Alumni Blues"–once the holy grail of bustouts–gave the second set extra heft. Phish's first take on "Cinnamon Girl" since 1997 proved that no song was off limits and that their thematic tunes didn't necessarily have to arrive at the start of the show.

7/30
JIMMIES DONUT
"The universe is a donut..."

NOTABLE JAMS: "Drowned"> "A Song I Heard the Ocean Sing" and "Harpua"
DEBUTS: Jimi Hendrix's "The Wind Cries Mary"
BUSTOUTS: "Esther," "Colonel Forbin's Ascent," "Fly Famous Mockingbird," all last played on Aug. 9, 2015 (76 shows)
RECAP: For fans of Phish's story-song narratives and compositional epics, this night proved the "never miss a Sunday show" adage to be true, thanks to appearances by seldom played, but beloved early numbers like "The Curtain With," "Esther," "Colonel Forbin's Ascent" and "Fly Famous Mockingbird" in the first set alone. Set two contrasted a beautiful, extended "A Song I Heard the Ocean Sing," a contender for the weekend's best jam, with a skit involving the donut-like topography of the universe during the band's most surefire special-night signifier, "Harpua."

8/1
MAPLE DONUT
"O Canada..."

NOTABLE JAMS: "Swept Away"> "Steep," and "Possum"
DEBUTS: "O Canada" and Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag"
BUSTOUTS: "Swept Away"> "Steep," last played on July 8, 2012 (192 shows); David Bowie's "Rock 'n' Roll Suicide," last played on Oct. 31, 2016 (21 shows, second performance ever)
RECAP: Maple night kicked off with an impromptu ode to the "Great White North," an instrumental version of the country's national anthem "O Canada." Kuroda also illuminated the Canadian flag in Madison Square's rafters, and the crowd responded with cheers that filled the arena. As the show moved on, the theme popped up now and again within the lyrics of "Sugar Shack" and "Leaves" as well as a "Maple Leaf Rag" piano interlude in the middle of "Guelah Papyrus." This night may have featured one of the run's silliest themes, but the music was serious on Jerry Garcia's birthday, with an elongated "Swept Away"> "Steep" and a surprisingly improvised "Possum" to end the second set. The show wrapped up with the band's second-ever performance of David Bowie's "Rock 'n' Roll Suicide."

8/2
DONUT HOLES
"You gotta keep the devil way down in the hole..."

NOTABLE JAMS: "Meat"> "Maze"
DEBUTS: Tom Waits' "Way Down in the Hole;" "O Holy Night"
BUSTOUTS: Norman Blake's "Ginseng Sullivan," last played on Aug. 7, 2015 (80 shows); "Meat," last played on July 9, 2016 (48 shows)
RECAP: Phish have an old-school original called "In A Hole," yet they stacked their Donut Hole setlist with left-field covers. The quartet opened the night with Tom Wait's bluesy "Way Down in the Hole" and followed it with a bunch of less obvious repertoire material ("Ginseng Sullivan," "Meat"), unexpected surprises ("O Holy Night") and prolonged, spacey jams that included the longest "Taste" in history (over 18 minutes). A second set arc starting with "Mike's Song" and ending with "Weekapaug Groove" rounded out another solid performance.

8/4
LEMON POPPY DONUT
"Sucking on a lemon..."

NOTABLE JAMS: "Punch You in the Eye"> "Party Time," "Everything in Its Right Place" and "Fluffhead"
DEBUTS: Blind Lemon Jefferson's "See That My Grave Is Kept Clean;" Radiohead's "Everything in Its Right Place"
BUSTOUTS: "Big Black Furry Creature From Mars," last played on July 20, 2016 (43 shows); "Dinner and a Movie," last played on July 21, 2013 (164 shows); "Dem Bones," last played on June 29, 2016 (55 shows, third performance ever)
RECAP: In a run that was punctuated by unexpected nods to other artists, Phish's version of Radiohead's "Everything in Its Right Place" may have been the most staggering debut of The Baker's Dozen. The *Kid A* track came halfway through the band's second set, and its "sucking on a lemon" lyric was quoted throughout the ensuing space jam that ebbed and flowed through "What's the Use?" and "Scents and Subtle Sounds." A triumphant "Prince Caspian" and a set-ending, hair-raising "Fluffhead" brought the set to a climax.

8/5
BOSTON CREAM DONUT
"Tomorrow's donut will be Kansas-Metallica flavored..."

NOTABLE JAMS: "Sunshine of Your Feeling" and "Ghost"
DEBUTS: "Sunshine of Your Feeling"
BUSTOUTS: "Frost," last played on July 17, 2013 (168 shows, second performance ever); Bob Marley and The Wailers' "Soul Shakedown Party," last played on July 3, 2016 (53 shows); "Uncle Pen," last played on July 16, 2016 (47 shows)
RECAP: Originally, many fans thought Boston Cream would be the most predictable night of the Baker's Dozen. After all, it was the flavor that Page McConnell referenced in a 2007 *Relix* interview, stating, in theory, that it would include covers of Boston and Cream. However, what fans did not expect was a Boston/Cream mash-up featuring portions of "Sunshine of Your Love," "More Than a Feeling," "Foreplay/Longtime" and "White Room" swirled together and executed with stunning precision. With the addition of a second-set "The Lizards" and "Quinn the Eskimo," Boston Cream night became one of the high watermarks for the entire Baker's Dozen.

8/6
GLAZED DONUT
"The life I love is making music with my friends..."

NOTABLE JAMS: "Simple"> "Rise/Come Together"> "Starman" and "On the Road Again"> "Lawn Boy Reprise"> "Tweezer Reprise"
DEBUTS: Vida Blue's "Most Events Aren't Planned"
BUSTOUTS: "I Been Around," last played on July 27, 2014 (119 shows); Jimi Hendrix's "Izabella," last played on July 31, 1998 (574 shows); Willie Nelson's "On the Road Again," last played on Aug. 31, 2013 (155 shows)
RECAP: Dozens of hopeful, ticketless fans lingered outside of Madison Square Garden in the hours leading up to Phish's 13th and final performance. The sold-out show was emotional to say the least, and while the first set had a number of great peaks, including "Saw It Again," "Bug" and some animated guitar from Anastasio during "Izabella," the five-song second set was where Phish reached new heights. A 25-minute "Simple" was a sign of good things to come, and the reappearance of David Bowie's "Starman" as well as the run's long-awaited "You Enjoy Myself" kept the energy soaring ever upward. After a venue-wide sing-along of "Loving Cup," Phish was honored with their own banner, which swayed above the band during their encore of "On the Road Again" and will permanently live in the rafters of Madison Square Garden. All four members were visibly emotional during the song, aware of the significance of the moment. Finally, Phish brought things full circle with a "Lawn Boy" reprise, before a celebratory, all-consuming performance of "Tweezer Reprise" drew the Baker's Dozen to a close

5 ARTISTS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

THE DUSTBOWL REVIVAL LOS ANGELES

Joyful, Cathartic Storytellers

The Dustbowl Revival have already staked their claim as hometown favorites, thanks to their can't-miss concerts, but the Los Angeles-based eight-piece ensemble is anxious to show that they can make great records, too. With their self-titled release, the band still demonstrates the good-time feeling of those lively performances, but also explores some deeper, darker terrain. It's hard to call this a shift in style for a group that has never followed convention, always embracing a multitude of genres. But, for singer, guitarist and band founder **Zach Lupetin**, there was a conscious effort to expand the emotional range of their repertoire. "The music that I love most touches on this basic truth of taking a painful experience and turning it into a joyful, cathartic story," explains Lupetin. "On this record, we're putting it all on the table: the dark and the light." Ted Hutt was a key catalyst in the studio—one of his chief goals as producer was to massage the band's live sound. "Getting us to chill back," says singer **Liz Beebe**. "Because our shows are so raucous and involved, having Ted tell people to stop showing off was important." Working as an equal partnership fostered a healthy, new collaborative environment, which led to the record's eponymous title. "This was the first album I felt had eight different voices as a part of it," she adds. The roots folk-funk outfit—who are known for their couplets of lock-tight horns and strings, from trombone and trumpet to mandolin and fiddle—can just as easily define themselves with soulful, harmony-rich vocals as with high-octane, instrumental bliss. And, after playing upward of 200 shows a year around the country, they've certainly learned how to keep their audiences engaged. "The difference now is that we try to put some of the emotional, darker songs in the set," says Lupetin. "Not that we don't get people's boots stomping," says Beebe. dustbowlrevival.com ***Larson Sutton***

Talley Media

7 COME 11 SANTA CRUZ, CALIF.

All Hail the Funk Gods

Conventional wisdom says that you should never meet your idols—they tend to disappoint when you realize they are, in fact, just people like anyone else. **Gianni Staiano**, however, went one step further and couldn't be happier about it. The **7 Come 11** founder and organist recently toured with the funky METERS, one of the current iterations of the legendary New Orleans funk godfathers, opening for the band and even sitting in with Art Neville on keys at times. Staiano explains that, from the first time he heard them, The Meters were a huge influence on his own brand of funk. "I'm sitting there with the motherfuckers who played it on the record, and it didn't even seem real," he gushes. "When I was a kid, they were just like gods. And then, to meet them—they're all such nice guys." Last year, **Scott Keller** signed on as 7 Come 11's drummer and, this spring, they released *Light It Up*, which finds the Berklee-trained organist letting loose on modern, P-Funk-inspired dance tracks. The EP is fueled, in part, by his newest toy: a whammy bar attached to his clavinet, which can morph the instrument's sound into a facsimile of a wailing funk guitar. "I learned about them a few years ago," explains Staiano. "All my life, I've been a keyboard player, and I've always wanted to bend notes. Then, I was on YouTube and I saw this fucking thing and I was like, 'Oh, my god, I need that!'"

7come11.net ***Matt Inman***

DEATHLIST PORTLAND, ORE.

Consciously Evocative

Jenny Logan has spent the past few years on the road, touring with My Teenage Stride, Mortals, World Atlas, Ribbons and Summer Cannibals. But, although she's proficient on guitar, piano, bass and drums, Logan never thought about a musical career. "I started learning piano when I was four or five," she recalls. "I was always making up songs, but I was very shy. I never shared them with anyone. I'd sit in the backyard by myself and sing." A few years of teaching high school in the Bronx cured her of her shyness and, after moving to Portland to attend law school, she began playing in bands. When Logan wasn't touring, she was writing the songs that appear on her debut, *deathlist*. "I started demoing songs at home. By last spring, I had 17 songs, from which I chose the 10 that are on the LP." When **deathlist** plays live, drummer **Riley Borne** and bass guitarist **Maggie May Morris** support Logan's fierce guitar attack and dark, introspective lyrics. However, she goes it alone on the album, delivering mid-tempo grooves that balance the quiet poetry of her lyrics with her accomplished fretwork.

The diverse arrangements include the grimy, New-Wave thrash of "Don't Mind Asking," the Hendrix-flavored power chords and spooky vocals of "Wait" and the simple chiming turn-around of "The Night," a tune with a hint of good humored '60s girl-group sass. Logan's bemused vocals are full of subtle emotion, but her lyrics are often hard to discern. "The music I love isn't necessarily technical or impressive, but it is evocative. I'd been listening to a lot of My Bloody Valentine lately and, although my lyrics are important to me, I wanted the vocals to have that instrument-like, blurry quality that they have on the *Loveless* record."

deathlist.bandcamp.com ***J. Poet***

CALEB CAUDLE WINSTON-SALEM, N.C.

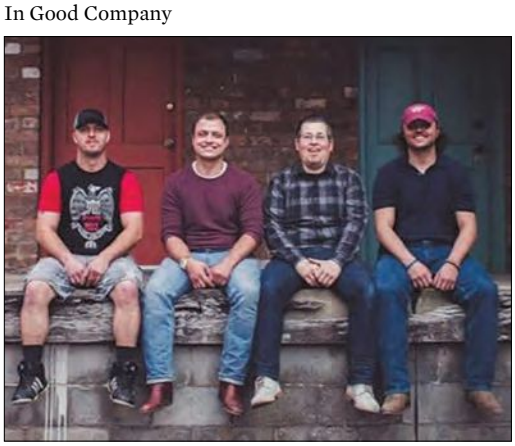
A Growing-Up Record

Caleb Caudle has already left town and returned. The North Carolina singer-songwriter came home to Winston-Salem after living in New Orleans for a stretch. In the interim, he sobered up, got married, made an excellent country record—2016's *Carolina Ghost*—and turned 30. But Caudle, who has spent much of 2017 working on his next record, *Crushed Coins*, wasn't interested in revisiting musical terrain that he'd already covered. The album, which was recorded in Los Angeles, will be Caleb's fourth full-length. The record is, according to Caudle, a more atmospheric affair—introspective and mature, but mellow. "This one feels a lot less country to me," says Caudle of the forthcoming record. "It's a little bit dreamier." This time around, Caudle says, he was soaking up the sounds of The Beach Boys, The Beatles, classic rock albums and a lot of jazz. For the last record, he was into Merle Haggard, Randy Travis and John Anderson and, if pedal steel and organ added defining flourishes to his last release, then Caudle says a string quartet, Mellotron and melodica were the instrumental touches that were called for this time around. "There's two things going on in this record—it's a more realistic view of relationships and love," says Caudle. "And there's another side of this album that deals with loss. This is kind of a growing-up record. It's really dealing with life. There's a few heartbreakers on the new record where I try not to get too happy." He laughs before adding, "I wouldn't want to put more than three songs about death on an album. I don't want it to be something people can only put on when they're bummed out."

calebcaudle.com ***John Adamian***

THE TRAVELIN' HILLBILLIES HARRISONBURG, VA.

In Good Company



When **The Travelin' Hillbillies** released the single "All in Good Company," the last thing that the Harrisonburg, Va.-based group expected was to be adorned with laurels from across the pond. But British record producer Stuart Epps, who has worked with Elton John, Led Zeppelin and Oasis, caught wind of the song and had some unexpected words to the band: "Superb playing—didn't know there were bands that could do this still." As **Ryan Daniel Garst**, the group's guitarist and backing vocalist explains, "We started playing folk and country music, and it turned into Southern rock and migrated into what it is now." Garst grew up singing with his brothers **Shay** and **Brandon**—honing in on lush three-part harmonies that recall the Eagles and Crosby, Stills & Nash—and, in 2012, they linked up with their fourth member, vocalist **Daniel Barnett**. Over 500 shows later, The Travelin' Hillbillies have crafted a true Shenandoah Valley sound, featuring a blend of their note-bending guitars, Barnett's syncopated howling and a timeless sweet spot for country and bluegrass. Their decidedly American melange—inspired by acts like the Allman Brothers Band, Little Feat and Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers—has made waves in the jamband world as well. Ryan even had the pleasure of showcasing his guitar stylings with Widespread Panic drummer Duane Trucks, Trey Anastasio Band trumpet player Jennifer Hartswick and Major League Baseball pitcher Jake Peavy at Charlottesville, Va.'s the Ante Room. He attributes the band's tight sound to their biological and communal brotherly connection. "It's always a family jam," he says.

facebook.com/travelinhillbillies ***Kyle Morgan***

WOMAN AT WORK

LESLIE MENDELSON

Hope, Loss, *Love & Murder*

LESLIE MENDELSON recently dropped her first album in eight years, *Love & Murder*, but the Brooklyn-based singer-songwriter was hardly stagnant during that time. With almost two LPs worth of music recorded before she even set out to work on her latest effort, Mendelson had to make the final push to release it, despite her inclination to move on to the next project.

"Because I started writing new songs, I thought, 'I should go and make another record!'" Mendelson says. "And then I was like, 'No, stop. Stop it. You have to put it out. I'm not going back into the studio again until I put out a record.'" Eventually, *Love & Murder* emerged from a session with producer Mark Howard, who helped her hone in on the most honest elements of her creative process.

"It was just me and [Mark], and I felt really comfortable and just sang songs," Mendelson says. "It was like, 'Well, this is me, so I have to just accept it because this is exactly what I sound like. If I can't like this, then I'm not going to like anything.' That was a big hurdle to get over, but I think the more I decided to embrace it, the more I liked it. There's a lot of hope, a lot of loss, a lot of redemption [on the album]. It's dark—there's some real sadness on it. I likeit because it is a flawed record. It's not perfect, but I like it for its honesty."

One of the album's tracks—a duet cover of Roy Orbison's "Blue Bayou"—actually came from an earlier session with Bob Weir, who has helped Mendelson become an increasingly regular face around the Bay Area. Weir first discovered Mendelson when he heard her cover of "Friend of the Devil," and they quickly struck up a friendship. They laid down their Orbison duet while she was at Weir's TRI Studios during Dead & Company's pre-tour rehearsals.

On her acceptance into this new community—which includes playing in Steve Kimock in his new father-son band KIMOCK and with Weir's recent Campfire Tour band, Mendelson says she's happy to revisit the music she grew up listening to on Long Island.

"I don't think my music is in the jamband scene," Mendelson says. "I just think that my love of the Grateful Dead has always kept me on its pulse—and it's such a great community. I think it will always be a part of me." ***Matt Inman***

GROUP AT WORK

BORIS GARCIA

Scanning the Dial

BOB STIRNER ISN'T afraid to admit that Boris Garcia's *Around Some Corner* is more than a little eclectic. "We're a bit bipolar, musically," the singer and guitarist says with a laugh while describing the Philadelphia six-piece's new record. "It's not like we're trying to be. It's just the way it works."

The genre-hopping isn't distracting, though. It's actually quite fun. The album opens with a traditional country tune, "Knockin' on Wood," takes a left turn with the '60s psych-pop rocker "Mendocino" and later skips over to a bluegrass jig named "Feather and Down." In Stirner's words, Boris Garcia can be best described as a "pop-Americana-bluegrassy jamband" and, under the tutelage of Railroad Earth's Tim Carbone, they walk a tightrope—writing and recording songs that sound full and radio-ready, while still having the wiggle room to thrive onstage.

"This was the most fun we have *ever* had recording," Stirner says, eager to note that it was Carbone who added both professionalism and levity to the sessions. When recording commenced at Carbone's studio in rural Pennsylvania, Stirner thought the songs for *Around Some Corner* were fully formed, but it was Carbone's keen skills as a producer that elevated their sound even further. In fact, Carbone's partnership with Boris Garcia dates back several years. He contributed to their three prior albums and is considered to be "family" by the whole band.

"Tim always takes what we do and makes it more radio friendly or gives it another hook or puts something in there that we never would have thought about," Stirner adds. "It's been a joy and an honor to work with him for so long."

While Carbone had the production covered, Stirner and bandmate Jeff Otto shouldered the songwriting. They worked apart and in tandem, fleshing out *Around Some Corner* quickly and efficiently. "It seems like whatever comes out of either of us is simpatico," Stirner says. "That's what I love about working with Jeff and vice-versa. I think we both write in a speaking-in-tongues kind of way—you hear the melody, visualize the words and you can't write fast enough."

Around Some Corner's title, a nod to "Box of Rain," picks up on the Grateful Dead's highly visual lyrics ("Around some corner, where it's been waiting to meet you"). As Stirner points out, it's a beautiful way to view life and work, success and failure, and the oscillating fates of being a musician: "You never know what's coming. It could be a bus that's ready to hit you or it could be the love of your life. You don't know. And it's just beautiful." ***Raffaela Kenny-Cincotta***

THE LOST ART OF HIPGNOSIS

When a freaky picture is worth a thousand words. *By* **JOHN ERIKSSON**

WHAT DOES A MAN with a melting face, a guy without a mouth and a lady with rubber legs have in common? Maybe not that much but, personally, these unusual conditions came to shape my life. And it was not until a couple of weeks ago that I learned that they were closely connected.

I was maybe six or seven when I was first left alone in a closed library on a dark winter Sunday afternoon. My father was probably in the Xerox machine room, copying pages from rare books, and I was told to stay hidden in the back of the damp *bibliotheca*.

At the bottom of one of many rows of bookshelves was a line of suspended plastic pockets containing a random variation of images. You could flip through them in the same way you could flip through a gigantic magazine. From right to left and then from left to right—again and again. Before me was a slideshow of, more or less, weird visual objects. I remember getting the chills from a drawing of a thin, creepy looking figure with hollow eyes staring at me from under a cloudy moonlight. I forced my fingers to keep flipping, but my hand soon slowed down again when my eyes got stuck on a photograph of a man with a face that was about to melt. My mind started spinning and I couldn't understand how on earth this was even possible. I was awoken by the voice of my father calling my name. It was time to go home.

A couple of years later, I was visiting my best friend—who lived a seven-minute bicycle ride from our house—after school in Hortlax, Sweden. We were usually outside looking for snakes in a nearby forest or inside his parents' house making cartoons and listening to music. My best friend's big brother had his own room

at the end of a dark hallway. We were strictly forbidden to enter his top-secret chamber but when my friend went down the stairs to eat dinner with his family, I found myself there, going through a box of stuff that was hidden behind a wooden writing desk.

Once again, my eyes suddenly froze at the black-and-white photograph on the cover of an album. This time, it was a woman coming out from a deformed wooden door. When I looked closer, I saw that her legs were distorted and twisted. The image was totally screwed up in a way that I could not grasp. Who was she? What was wrong with her? Was she a relative of someone in the band? Why was this freaky picture on the cover of this album?

I have never been interested in music history. I have no heroes, and I have never cared about who is playing what or who the composer of a certain work is. It's not that I'm bad with names. For me, the sounds have always been enough. But, sometimes, history catches up with you.

Two weeks ago a designer and I started talking about *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*, which is a double album by Genesis. There is a triptych of photos on the front that creates some sort of a dark riddle. These, and all the other black-and-white snapshots inside the vinyl release, made my music experience spellbinding. It transformed figures played on the guitars into secret paths into dark corridors, and it turned tom-toms into possessed heartbeats. And I am not even a fan of symphonic rock. I actually tried to listen to some other Genesis albums but nothing much happened. It was just this one that contained this perfect fusion of sound and vision.

My designer friend told me more about a design group called Hipgnosis and, after a couple of minutes, it dawned on me that all the record covers that had thrilled me had been made by the same hands. The rubber lady on Rainbow's *Bent Out of Shape*, as well as Peter Gabriel's melting face on the cover of his third solo album, were crafted by the same visual artists at Hipgnosis. My informer showed me that the strange plastic obelisk on a kitchen table on Led Zeppelin's *Presence* came from the same brilliant minds. And I learned that the simple but very effective (and unusual) heavy metal cover for AC/DC's *Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap* was their idea as well.

There is, of course, a long list of classic album covers that are considered to be milestones, but I am in awe over some of Hipgnosis' stunning ideas. For me, this is such a lost art. Maybe this is just a case of childhood nostalgia, but isn't it sad that the most striking visual input you get today is how many times the song you are listening to has been played on Spotify?

Anyway, the art is very hard to see. When I was growing up in a small town in the north of Sweden, art was also very far away. The closest things were my encounters with Hipgnosis' spectacular photograph experiments on the mysterious vinyl covers. And, again and again, they apparently managed to surpass themselves and to surprise me.

Despite my disinterest in history and hard facts, I bought a book about the art group a couple of days ago. I read that Hipgnosis was a small group of English designers: Storm Thorgerson, Aubrey Powell and Peter Christopherson. And they did the artwork for a big bunch of albums during the golden age of vinyl.

I flipped through the book in the same way as I flipped through the suspended records in the music library when I was a kid. But when I came to the information about the specific objects that had thrilled me, I repelled the curiosity of reading about them.

I do not want to know how they did it. I want to keep the mysteries alive. What I'm looking for all the time is the "what the fuck?" reaction—that feeling when you don't know what you are listening to or what you are looking at.

I praise the guts that Hipgnosis must have had. They were masters of their art form and they knew that a freaky picture is worth a thousand words.

Composter/arranger/drummer John Eriksson is a founding member of the seminal Swedish indie-pop group Peter Bjorn and John. He recently released Lightworks*, the third album under his electronic-music alias Hortlax Cobra.*

LARRY CAMPBELL AND TERESA WILLIAMS

After spending many years supporting the likes of Levon Helm, Little Feat and Hot Tuna, the "First Couple of Americana" strike out on their own with another album of original material and classic covers. *By* **MIKE GREENHAUS**

WORDS AND MEANING

LARRY CAMPBELL: The songs on *Contraband Love* started gestating about a year and a half ago. I had to take a break from songwriting after our [2015 self-titled debut] because it's a difficult process for me; I waited for the inspiration to come around again and it finally did. Over the course of about a year, the original songs started coming in and Teresa and I started looking for a couple of covers.

We started recording in February—the melodies came to me first. That's a joyous experience. Then comes the hard work, thinking of something to write about and actually sitting down to write it in a way that either hasn't been done before or that is personal.

TERESA WILLIAMS: It's hard for us to even have a sit-down conversation. Larry can express himself with music, no problem, but when you add words, it forces him to go somewhere that he may not like.

LOVE SICK

LC: Our last album was my first foray into concentrated songwriting. There are guys who can do this all day, every day. They're built that way—writing a song is just an automatic way of expressing themselves. It doesn't work that way for me. After that record, I felt like I might never write another song again. It took a year or so of performing the songs live and getting real comfortable with them—understanding what Teresa and I were all about on a whole other level—before the inspiration to write came back again. That was the spark to get this next record going.

If a song is an honest expression, then you have to go down into the dark places you may not want to visit and put that out there for everybody to see. But this experience, or this emotion, is filtered through the music so that the people listening to it are not just staring at you in your underwear.

TW: This is Larry and songwriting: After he finished this one song, we were driving along in the car on our way to Tennessee. We had been sitting quiet for a while and, all of the sudden, he says, out of the blue: "I just feel violated." It was perfect! I laughed and I was like, "From finishing that song?" And he was like, "Yeah."

RAMBLE ON

LC: Teresa and I started working with Levon in '05, and we have done virtually everything together since then. It happened organically. We all had an opportunity to hone our thing in the Ramble Band, and we made a conscious effort to make something of our own after Levon died. It was, "What are we going to do now?"

I wasn't going to stop producing records, but this is *ours*. Teresa and I do it together. We travel together; we make music together. It was time that we took this thing that we were given the opportunity to do with all these great artists and break out on our own and see what happens. It's probably the most fulfilling thing that I've done musically in my career. I want to keep walking down this path until it hangs above a cliff.

ALL THE KING'S MEN

LC: We recorded *Contraband Love* at Justin Guip's studio in Milan Hill, N.Y. Justin has engineered every record I've produced since we started working for Levon. He was the studio manager at Levon's place up until Levon's demise, and then moved all the equipment up to his barn. He played drums on the record, but our bassist, Byron

Isaacs, was stolen from us by The Lumineers. [*Laughs.*] Simone Felice produced their last record and called Byron to play bass. They were knocked out by his bass playing and his whole vibe and they grabbed him.

So Jesse Murphy played on most of our record. And we have Bill Payne playing keyboards—I want to make another record with him. I first met Bill back in 2000 when I was playing with Dylan and he was touring with Phil and Friends. Teresa, Justin, Byron and I did a few tracks that Bill wrote with Robert Hunter. I hope they will eventually see the light of the day.

KICKING UP DIRT

LC: Teresa's been singing Carl Perkins' "Turn Around" for years, and we performed it with Levon and the Ramble Band quite a few times. In fact, that's him playing drums on the rhythm track we used on the new record. While we were making Levon's *Electric Dirt* record, we had some downtime, so he suggested that Teresa and I record a couple of tunes. We did five rhythm tracks with Levon, Byron and Justin. We put "You're Running Wild" on the last record and we thought we should put another tune with Levon on it on this record.

We'll go through the tracks again and see if we can add something else to the next record, too. There are still a few things in Levon's vault that I'm aware of and there's probably a lot more that I'm not aware of that goes back to the RCO days and the post-Band era. One of these days, I want to get up there and go through as much as we can.

THE OLD HOMEPLACE

TW: We made the effort to get back to our home in Tennessee to do the photo shoot for the record. Since the 1830s, various members of my family have lived there. My brother was living there when he died back in '86—every generation would add another layer of wallpaper or a plank or paint. We took this picture of a wall in the cabin for the album—it looks decrepit. You can see the wallpaper peeling away and the different layers all, down to the wall, and the different contributions of all these generations. In hindsight, it's symbolic—that is, for the music on the record.

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CHRIS ROBINSON BROTHERHOOD

Barefoot in the Head BY DEAN BUDNICK

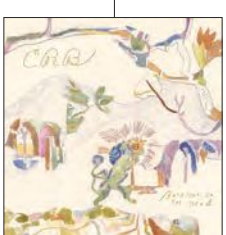
"I'VE NEVER BEEN interested in hit songs. As a matter of fact, most bands' biggest hits are the songs I would never play," Chris Robinson declares, with a laugh. "That's just me. It's not being difficult; it's just the way my mind works or where the connection is. Writing songs was always my entry into this world of being a musician, and of all the ups and the downs and the goods and the bads. It all started because I wanted to write. It's funny, at 50 years old, you come back around. And again, that's the fuel, this material, for any musician worth his weight when given new music or a new composition—at least in our band."

This is what prompted the Chris Robinson Brotherhood to re-enter the studio in late 2016 to record the follow-up to last year's full-length album, *Anyway You Love, We Know How You Feel*, and its companion EP, *If You Lived Here, You Would Be Home by Now*. These sessions were the first to feature the CRB's current roster, which also includes co-founding guitarist Neal Casal and keyboard player Adam MacDougall, along with the new rhythm section of drummer Tony Leone, who came onboard in 2015, and bassist Jeff Hill, who joined in 2016.

"We were really in a great place when we finished the last record, our first self-production. It was a really good energy," Robinson expounds. "I came home from those *Anyway You Love* sessions, and I just kept writing. It seemed like my acoustic guitar was at the forefront. I didn't send any songs around to anyone or anything but, by the fall, I was sitting on 12 or 13 things that weren't complete. We were in a harmonious place after having Jeff join the band, spending another year on the road with our rhythm section and knowing that these are our dudes. So we made the decision to record. One idea I thought would be cool was not to bring any of our road gear—no amps or guitars that we used on tour. That set us off on a little bit of a different thing.

"If we didn't have the material or the imagination to be there, then I suppose we would have just said we could keep touring but, as a communal group, our perspective is: Every song's like a new elixir. Every song is a new shape or texture or color or phrase we can use in our stories. We have the unique opportunity to create something on the run, in a way. We don't have nostalgia, we don't have hit records and we don't have, 'Ahhh, remember in the summer of '95...'

"So, *Barefoot in the Head* is representative of this freedom we have to be creative. Ultimately, as musicians, that's what we've craved our whole careers, our whole lives. Maybe we all can't drop out and move to a commune in Oregon, but we can do it in our music. We can do it in our mindset; we can do it in our business model. I think that's the energy and where the creative heart still is in this band."



BEHOLD THE SEER

"Behold the Seer" is like a two-part song, but it's quintessentially CRB. The demo name of this song was "Shit Kicker." It was more rootsy country. I had the intro riff and my little verse parts. Then, instantly Neal wrote the chorus and, while we were playing, I said, "Adam, what do you want to do? It's your solo—what do you want to play over?" So he went to his chords. The song came together very quickly. It's a song about being able to have your moment to focus through the fog or clarity with the maya around us. And how some people almost have special eyewear to be able to see through whatever sort of trance we're in.

SHE SHARES MY BLANKET

This is my favorite song on the record. I wanted to write an updated, more romantic version of two people who are in love and moved somewhere to grow weed or something. Their backstory wasn't important, but their love affair was. I wanted the words to feel like a Robert Altman movie, in a way.

The song is made up of scenes. I wanted them to play out over the music, as if in your mind, you were watching a movie. The first bit, "Barefoot through the crocus among the dreaming trees"—that's the opening scene. That's the credits where this beautiful girl is in the woods walking through the crocus flowers. But then, if it were a script, it would say, "Scene II: Inside the Cabin," and that would be another scene where they're in their simple dwelling and she's combing her hair. It kind of moves from there and starts in the autumn and ends in the winter. So it takes place just over a few months—this love affair is going on with these people. The instrumental section in the middle, which I believe Adam orchestrated,

Brothers of the road: Tony Leone, Jeff Hill, Chris Robinson, Neal Casal, Adam MacDougall

Jay Blakesberg

fits perfectly. It's the montage of what's going on in their lives during that part. It's a real visual song to me. It opens with this beautiful girl walking through the forest, and the camera should be moving in on her. Some songs aren't like that at all, but I see this one like a storyboard. I'm visualizing the image and writing it down in a script form, at least to a weirdo like me.

HARK, THE HERALD HERMIT SPEAKS

This song would be the complete opposite, where we'd have to find a different director. It's more stream of consciousness. I love Bob Dylan. To me, he's still the songwriter's poet *numero uno*. He's still on the apex. I love when he writes a song that has got a lot of words, and he's letting them avalanche out of his mouth. This is another one of those rare tunes I had already finished, so I had the whole thing. It's just a kaleidoscopic, strange little song. I don't really know what it's about or what it means. I just think it's visions from a stranger, wandering the earth.

BLONDE LIGHT OF MORNING

"Blonde Light of Morning" is a meditation on the things we can be responsible for, the stuff that's in our control. We can be in control of our perspective; and then there's stuff that's out of our control. The anxiety and chaos, the fear and ignorance—that's about our perception of things.

If you perceive everything to be dark, if you perceive everything to be hopeless, then that's what you'll get. If you can perceive in a more gentle way, in a more humane way, you still have to weather the same storms and the same slings and arrows, but you'll get what you make of it. I like for this song to represent a calm place in the storm.

DOG EAT SUN

"Dog Eat Sun" represents the alchemical process of enlightenment. I have these "little songs" that are just verse, chorus and maybe a little more, I don't know how to describe them. And we have an opportunity, when we make a record, for something like "Dog Eat Sun." I like the idea of these other little smaller things that are living studio things. These are things that just happened in the studio, so we wouldn't necessarily ever have to go out and play "Dog Eat Sun" live or the way we recorded it.

I had this strange apocalyptic vision for this song but, again, was saved by the universal one. The cosmic consciousness is a part of that song. In a strange way, there are these little signposts throughout the record of otherworldly activity.

BLUE STAR WOMAN

"Blue Star Woman" is a little bit tongue in cheek. The images are kind of outrageous—some woman looking crazy on top of the stairs with a flower in her mouth because she has nailed the head and right hand of her man to the door of her house. The postman and the neighbor on the lawn are saying, "More! More!" It's just kind of a dream song. There's the part about her pillow being wet and she wanted to blame it on one of her pets—"I said, 'Do you have a cat?' She said, 'Why, no, not yet.' And wouldn't you bet when out from under her dress..."

But we don't know what's under her dress—it could be anything. It could be a computer, a very small man from a spaceship or some egg salad. We don't know. It's always been my style in some respects; I'm never going to make it super easy. There has to be something obtuse or something in the imagery that's different. Again, when I was a kid and heard Bob Dylan say, "Jewels and binoculars hang from the head of the mule" [in "Visions of Johanna"], if you asked five or six people what that means, they would all say something different. Is your interest in dreams? Do you have interest in mythology? Do you have interest in the esoteric? Do you like the language of manuals or something? [*Laughs*.]

I always want my lyrics to be open-ended in terms of how people interpret them, how they translate them into their own scenes. Obviously, the juxtaposition with the music should be the catalyst. That's the alchemic catalyst because they have to coexist in a very specific way for it to be interesting and dynamic.

There are rules to poetry, but any great poet has broken the rules. It's that way with anything, isn't it? For people who are interested in technology and business, aren't the most successful people always the mavericks who are on the outside looking in? I digress because we live in a time where the purity of that is diluted in the poison of status and success.

But Bob Dylan has never cared if you get it. Again, out of all the poignant lyrics and all the amazing stuff in "Isis," he says, "I was thinking about diamonds and the world's biggest necklace." I mean, I want to see the world's biggest necklace. I've never seen that fucking thing—I want to see it!

HIGH IS NOT THE TOP

Sometimes I will write a little bluegrassy, folky, bluesy song that's just so simple. And I'll play it for everyone and Neal will respond, "Dude, that's it—let's just do it." I love that he's always really positive about a song like that.

Tony's been shredding on his mandolin, and Neal's been adding all these other instruments to his repertoire. So this little folky morality tale is a great vehicle for everybody

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CHRIS RAGAN

By **BRADLEY TUCKER**

CHRIS RAGAN HAS SPENT the past 27 years as a lighting designer and board operator for some of the biggest touring acts in the world. After honing his craft on the road with moe., Gov't Mule, The Strokes and Outkast, to name a few, Ragan was the obvious choice when Dead & Company were looking for a lighting designer in 2015. If you've seen one of their shows, live or in pictures, then you know that Ragan has a strong connection to the music. And while a certain level of technical acumen is necessary, his hard work and artistry are what makes the difference.

What was the live music scene like where you grew up?
The music scene was really small in Upstate New York. I would see a lot of blues music, but the rock-and-roll that came through was mostly limited to major touring acts like the Rolling Stones. If anything came to town, I would go see it, from country to heavy metal. I probably saw Crosby, Stills & Nash 30 times before I was 17. When I was in college, I ended up co-managing a jamband Sons of Papaya. They were good friends of Mimi Fishman—my neighbor at the time—and that's how I got involved in the local music scene.

Because they played New York City quite a bit, that brought me to places like Wetlands, and I realized that I could see five bands in one day. That was the mecca—all of these bands from all over the country who I liked were coming to play.

How did you get into lighting?
If you really enjoy something, then you find a way to be a part of it. Most of these club bands didn't bring a lighting designer, but I would run lights for Sons of Papaya because it was on the creative end. I remember coming to New York City and moe. played there. They didn't have a lighting guy—they had an audio engineer and a merch guy/tour manager. I loved the music, so I would just start flashing lights. It evolved into something. At the same time, I was also wrapping up college, where I was building stage sets. Mimi was really interested in building backdrops, and we had a partnership. I was using a lot of UV paints, and I built my own stage lights out of different things and made boxes out of them. I went from playing with the stage sets, and using UV lights on set pieces to get them to pop, to getting professional lighting.

I built my first real "paid for" stage set for moe. in the mid-'90s. I didn't know much about the touring market and that this set had to roll up and fit in the back of a van, so it was a little bit cumbersome. Then, moe. played a gig at Irving Plaza in 1995. It was a graduation from Wetlands, and they wanted it to be super special, so they commissioned me to build this stage-set backdrop piece, which was this 8-track player, UV boom box. We brought in some specialty lighting and I took control of that. I decided that this was what I wanted to do because it was the perfect way to tie in my visual artwork and music. I have a background in fine arts and sculpture, so I sold my nice Harley-Davidson motorcycle and I bought three automated moving lights. It was super basic lighting, not like you think of it now—we would rent lights from different places. And, in '95–'96, I started going full-time with moe.

And then, eventually, you worked at Wetlands.
Larry [Bloch] still owned it and saw that I would bring these lights in. We made a deal that when I wasn't on the road with either moe. or Yolk, I would be at Wetlands. It got to the point where I was doing five nights at Wetlands. It was decent money in the '90s. I would do everything, and I attribute that to the way I was able to hone my craft. The music was so diverse—it wasn't just hippie bands, it was world-beat, spoken-word. We'd go from a whole bunch of punk bands on a Sunday to a Dead night on Tuesday. It taught me a lot about how different acts require different things.

I was out with moe. nationally from 1997 to about 2001. From there I started doing funk and groove music, which led me to hip-hop—I did Karl Denson, Jurassic 5, Outkast, Common, Gang Starr and Floetry. Then I spent two years with The Strokes before I needed to get off the road. These were career bands doing 150–200 shows a year. It was hard. You were gone a lot, and it wasn't a lot of money. So I was off the road for a few months, and that's when the whole BML thing happened. [He began working at BML-Blackbird, which supplies lighting and other production services to the entertainment industry.] They created that company, and now I'm going on 10 years with them.

Describe an influence on your career. I've loved the Grateful Dead since I was 14. Candace Brightman was a huge influence to me, not only just artistically, but also as a mentor and friend. I got to know her in '97 because she was the designer on the Furthur tour and moe. was on that. Even though we were pretty low men on the totem pole, she was very kind to me and helped me learn a lot.

I went to see Tom Petty when I was 15 years old, and he had a hell of a light show—Jim Lenahan was his LD back then. And growing up in the same neighborhood with Jon Fishman, I saw Phish and they have a pretty epic light show. Chris Kuroda really knows his band well. And, of course, if you ask any lighting designer that's in this so called "genre," then Pink Floyd's Marc Brickman is going to be among their top influences because of the magnitude and the precision. If you have the creativity and the buzz, then you're halfway there.

What was an early lesson that you learned? It always seems to be a recurring theme in this business—"See you on the way up. See you on the way back down"—so you better be nice to everybody. One day the janitor might own the music venue you're playing. You never know who's going to end up being your boss, and you never know who's going to be the next hot thing. You really need to learn to be kind to everybody in this business. You don't know what you could offer them someday or what they could offer you.

You spent time working at different venues and festivals, including The Capitol Theatre. How did you end up working with Dead & Company?
Gov't Mule and I have had a relationship since the Wetlands days and, when Allen [Woody] passed away [in 2000], Matt Busch, who was Gov't Mule's tour manager, was suddenly out of a job. He ended up coming out on the road with moe.

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ZACH GILL

The ALO singer/keyboardist and Jack Johnson collaborator takes a tour of his own multiverse on his new, guest-filled album *By* **DEAN BUDNICK**

IT'S BEEN NINE YEARS since the release of Zach Gill's previous full-length solo record, *Zach Gill's Stuff*, but the lag between albums was not for want of original material. The keyboard player—who balances his touring and recording life with ALO and his commitments to Jack Johnson's band—explains, "I'm always writing. And, as soon as I made that first solo album, I said to myself: 'This is a whole different thing than working on band records, and I want to keep doing this' but life kind of gets in the way or has other plans for you, and it always seemed like it wasn't the right time. Every once in a while, people would ask me, 'Hey, when are you going to do another one?' and I wouldn't have a good answer. Last year, I suddenly got that feeling that if I didn't start it, it wasn't going to happen. But just when I thought I didn't have any time, I realized that there was some right there on my calendar.

"I had all these songs that were of a personal nature. A lot of them had been around for a while. When ALO makes a record, sometimes the first step is to send each other our songs and talk about which ones feel good. Sometimes the more personal ones end up not being selected because they're not as indicative of the group mindset, so I had a few of these that had been sitting around and it was like, 'What happened to that song?'"

On *Life in the Multiverse*, Gill is joined by two of his steady collaborators: ALO bassist Steve Adams and Jack Johnson drummer Adam Topol, along with a few guests, including Johnson, Nicki Bluhm, Edward Sharpe & the Magnetic Zeros' Stewart Cole and Gill's daughter Jaden.

Did you select the album title to reflect some of its changing moods? I've come to realize that the first half of the album is pretty extroverted. The tempos are relatively up—there are drum machines, electric guitars, special guests and it's very much in the world. It's about people, places and things. Then the second half of the album is more about cerebral feelings that appear in your life and you're not sure what to do with them, and you just sort of carry on. There are times when I'm writing a song and I know what prompted it—and it's got lyrics—but I'm not necessarily sure what they mean or where it's going. For me, a lot of times, the process of writing the song, recording it and listening back to it helped me to transfer a lot of the energy that inspired the song in the first place.

There are songs that come to me conceptually and there are songs that just write themselves, like in a dream. With "Up From Down Below," my wife came back from this retreat—for a friend's 40th birthday party, she went to this retreat center near Big Sur on the coast and there was no cellphone reception so we couldn't contact her. I had both my daughters for the week, and it was the first time I had them for a full week without my wife. She was going to dance this thing called the five rhythms, and she didn't know anything about it. She doesn't do stuff like this normally, but she was a tap dancer when she was a little girl, so she knows dance. Anyway, for eight hours a day, they danced the five rhythms of life, and she came back so full of excitement and joy that she wrote each one of us a letter that was really sweet and meaningful. It was a transformative experience. So as she was telling me about this retreat, I wrote that song, but I don't know if anyone would otherwise understand what [the song] was talking about.

Can you point to a song on the album that's more conceptual in its origins? "Joy" definitely began with a concept. I kept hearing the term "guilty pleasures" and I began working backward from that concept. People will sometimes ask me, "What are your guilty pleasures?" in the way that Dave Grohl talks about how he loves ABBA or something and then, other people will realize, "Well, I love ABBA too." It's funny, the

Nick Walker

> "There are songs that come to me conceptually and there are songs that just write themselves."
> ZACH GILL

way we dress—the way we present ourselves—sends out all these signals and then, all of the sudden, people can't believe Dave Grohl would like ABBA but everybody likes ABBA.

I think we're in a different era. Back before music was so readily available, people had their share of guilty pleasures. But now, we're actually in an era of "guilty displeasures," where we're ashamed to admit we don't like the cool or quirky music that everyone else likes. Now the thing that can really embarrass us is not what we like; it's what we don't like or don't appreciate.
You're totally right. Unless you're from that era—I was always tripped out by the Deadheads who hated *Shakedown Street*. That's the age we're at, where we're supposed to be culturally open-minded, and then something doesn't work for you musically, but you know it's supposed to, and you're like, "Why am I not hearing it?" *South Park* captured it best when they did that whole thing where the adults complained that everything's sounding like shit because, literally, when the adults put on the headphones, they only hear shit sounds, and the kids hear something different. And then one kid gets old enough and everything starts to sound like shit, and they're like, "You've become a cynical bastard!"

Going back to your original point in the song, as you look back, what are some of those guilty pleasures you experienced?
The first thing that I was into when I was like a little kid was Kenny Rogers. And then I remember I had a babysitter who was really into Duran Duran, and she made some sort of "Kenny Rogers?" remark and then I was like, "OK, Kenny Rogers—not cool. Duran Duran—cool." Then I got into Duran Duran for a second, but I was still pretty young. The thing I remember *really* getting into was Huey Lewis and the News and

> "Jack [Johnson] was the first guy I knew who was writing songs.
> ZACH GILL

thinking they were great. I went to their concert in fourth grade, and then, somewhere in junior high, it was Pink Floyd and things got a little darker. Looking back, I think part of it was trying to be edgy when you're discovering stuff and, all of the sudden, either someone says something to you or you see other kids somewhere that look different, and you sort of adopt a new thing.

The thing that brought it up to me is when I saw my daughter doing the same thing, with stuff she liked a year ago. That's the rate at which we change. I don't know how this fits in, but I just learned that when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly, it goes into its cocoon and it liquefies. [*Laughs*.] How crazy is that? There's a whole transition point in its life where it's just liquid again. And it made me think of all the ways we transition and that when we're in the transition, we're liquid. We're wafting back and forth, or maybe we haven't quite melted down.

When you were talking about Dave Grohl, you mentioned issues of style and presentation, which also can complicate public reception of music.
I was reading one of those Bob Lefsetz letters that said something to the effect that there has been a battle going on in the musician camps between virtuosity in one camp and style and feel in the other. And the winners were obvious—look at how much sooner the punk rockers got inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame than the prog-rockers, and it hit me that the musicians who figured out the style thing early on are huge rock stars. And the prog-rockers took a totally different approach and I feel like—for whatever reason—early on, I was wowed by prog-rock. I went down the jazz river, like, "Jazz is cool," whereas it wasn't until my adulthood that I came to appreciate punk rock and all that it brings. I somehow didn't hear it until I started playing in Jack's band because Jack's really into Fugazi.

Since you mentioned Jack—beyond introducing you to Fugazi—how do you think you've influenced each other's songwriting over the years?
Our connection as friends was always through songwriting. Besides me, Jack was the first guy I knew who was writing songs. We both were in college and we were like, "Oh, yeah, we write songs." Especially in ALO, everyone's become songwriters over time but, at the time, Steve was studying bass and Dan [Lebowitz] was studying guitar. I wasn't really that great on my instrument, but I could write songs. Jack and I always connected on that, and in some ways, it's hard to say where it stops. I help him with songs; he helps me with songs. We have pretty different styles, but we're into the same things, so they definitely inform each other.

It's been crazy, though, being around his success and seeing what works. It's hard not to take note of that. I try to keep my own artistic identity but, as the saying goes, "I am a part of all I have met." As a musician and a writer, everything you hear and see gets in there and, sometimes, it goes up to the surface and you can filter it out or not.

In the late-'90s at Santa Barbara, the way we were all playing acoustic guitars in the dorms was that Jack style. I had a little more of that Bay Area jam thing in me I suppose. And there's this little mix of Southern California reggae—Sublime probably became the biggest version of that—but I see a lot of bands from Slightly Stoopid to Rebelution to Iration taking this kind of reggae, mixed with a little hip-hop, mixed with a little SoCal sensibility, and it seems like it's been alive for a while now. It's a sound that I knew from the dorms.

Speaking of California, what prompted your song "San Francisco?"
I grew up in San Jose, just about an hour south, and San Francisco was always the exotic city. And then, when we were down in Santa Barbara going to school, we would go up to San Francisco and see Charlie Hunter Trio play at the Elbo Room, and started to be like, "Wow, there's a real scene in San Francisco." We'd go to Fillmore shows. We never really went to Los Angeles but we were always drawn to the north, especially because the acid-jazz thing was happening in the late-'90s, and it seemed like a real thing to be a part of at the time.

We had an acid-jazz band called the Magnum Family—a little bit of hip-hop, a little bit of jazz, a little bit of funk and a little bit of jam. There was this reverence toward San Francisco and then, after college, I moved up to the Bay Area. I went to this party in the East Bay and I thought, "I'm going to move into an artist loft, and just have this whole experience in San Francisco," but then my girlfriend [now wife] got pregnant, and we ended up moving to Marin, out into the country, and we later moved to Santa Barbara, so I never really lived in San Francisco. Yet, I'd come back and the rest of the band was all there, and I'd have these San Francisco experiences.

And when ALO's *Sounds Like This* came out, I was walking through The Mission, which was an area I hung out in a fair amount and I thought, "I love this city," so I started writing this song. First it was a song about San Francisco, and then it kind of shifted to become a song about homes in general, and how you can have multiple homes. I lived in Augusta, Ga., for a couple of months one summer and, when I go back there, it's like, "This feels like home." Then there's my folks house in Saratoga [Calif.] It just seems like the more you travel and the more you spend time in places and fall in love with them, then a part of you is always there.

CAGE THE ELEPHANT

By ROB SLATER

MATT SHULTZ HAPPILY ADMITS THAT CAGE The Elephant is a long way from a retrospective record. "Our record label, RCA, called for the option of a greatest-hits release," the frontman says of the band's plans for a follow up to 2015's Dan Auerbach-produced *Tell Me I'm Pretty*. "A greatest-hits record felt like the end of a career. We're just starting, and we're about to go into the best part of our lives, creatively."

Instead, Cage The Elephant have issued their first live acoustic album, *Unpeeled*, which showcases the softer side of the Kentucky-born rockers. Recorded throughout their Live & Unpeeled tour, the unique concert souvenir pares the band's festival-shaking, boisterous rock sound down in new and thoughtful ways, thanks to the addition of a string section (arranged by Cage guitarist Nick Bockrath) and backing vocalists. The inspiration for the tour came in 2016 after the group received an invitation to play Neil Young's unplugged Bridge School Benefit Concert. Shultz recalls looking for a unique way to fill the sonic depths that have made band's studio albums modern classics.

As he stripped down a decade's worth of songs before the tour, Shultz was forced to take an intimate look at his catalog of original material. "It was a great experience to go back," Shultz says. "We've had that, 'ah-ha' moment where we understand every little detail. It's a piece to the whole communication element of the song that's really important. It was a cool opportunity to take the songs that we wished were better and add that crown-molding."

Though he's known for his rowdy onstage antics, Shultz is actually quite reserved while dissecting the state of Cage The Elephant. He speaks thoughtfully and carefully as he traces the band's growth, admitting that their first two records—2009's self-titled debut and 2011's *Thank You Happy Birthday*—sound more like a band "learning how to make records," while 2015's *Melophobia* "feels like the first album we made as a band."

He touches on the preconceived notions the band had to unload while recording *Melophobia*. "You grow up and you get indoctrinated with this pop culture—you believe in the persona. You try to play out these characters and that's just not real life," he explains. The exercise of peeling back the track's layers for their recent tour unlocked a previously unattainable creative process. "When I got rid of all that baggage, I got to the root of what art is. Art really is just communication. The more you can get to the bottom of that and make it potent, the more impactful the material's going to be."

Shultz speaks candidly about branching away from the "commerciality" that, at times, has hindered the band's creative process. He's also been able to observe how some of his friends and heroes handle their fame up close. Recently, Shultz has popped up on stages with Portugal. The Man (with whom he performed Oasis' "Don't Look Back in Anger" at Bonnaroo), Incubus (for a tribute to Chris Cornell) and Prophets of Rage after an invite came from Tom Morello to join the band on MC5's thrasher "Kick Out the Jams."

"I didn't know the lyrics," Shultz admits. "While they were onstage, I just wrote the lyrics out 100 times on a piece of paper."

Cage have welcomed their share of guests, too. As a now-famous tale goes, while on tour with the Foo Fighters in 2011, drummer Jared Champion's appendix burst before a gig and Dave Grohl filled in for a spur-of-the-moment collaboration. It taught Shultz a lesson that he's carried with him into Cage The Elephant's second decade.

"I heard from his crew that he had gone on his bus and put our records on. He didn't know our songs," Shultz says. "He just crammed, like you were going to cram for a test. I just respect that so much. That's one of the beautiful things about human beings—our ability to learn and become skillful."

All of these experiences bled into *Unpeeled*'s creation. "We always dreamed big, but we just didn't know how to bring it to fruition at that point," Shultz says. "It was a great experience to go back and say, 'When we wrote that [song] acoustically, we had big dreams for it—we just didn't know how to do it.' Now, with all the years of experience behind us, we were able to go back and execute [these songs] in a way that was more true to what we had originally hoped."

Shultz sees the process as a validation of Cage's growth, and lights up while describing the band's next act. The ensemble spent the early part of July touring Europe as well as woodshedding through major festivals on both sides of the pond. And, throughout, they documented their travels for *Relix*.

"Communication is key in the next phase of our career," he gushes, noting that he hopes the band can embrace a number of new and old musical aesthetics down the road. "I get excited about electronic music, but I also get excited about styles of music that are ancient. I'm really excited, full of creativity."

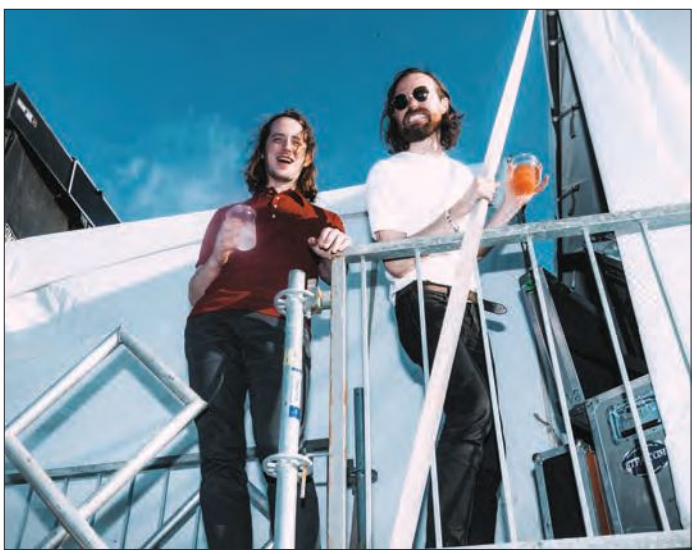
Matt Shultz tries on an audience member's glasses at Forecastle

The pouring rain doesn't stop Matt from jumping at OpenAir St. Gallen in Switzerland

Matt Shultz elimbing on the crowd at the Netherlands' Down the Rabbit Hole

Brad Shultz at the WayHome Festival in Ontario, Canada

Daniel Tichenor at Down the Rabbit Hole



Nick Bockrath and Matthan Minster enjoying a moment together pre-show at Forecastle in Louisville, K.Y.

Daniel Tichenor and his trusted bass at Forecastle

Forecastle pyro

Nick Bockrath at Los Angeles' KROQ Weenie Roast y Fiesta

FESTIVAL GUIDE ENCORE

FESTIVAL SEASON is far from over, even after the last rose of summer pricks our finger. These days, some of the best musical gatherings and destination events take place during the fall harvest, the holiday season and beyond—from sandy tropical beaches to snowy oasis settings, and classic fields and farms around the globe. Throughout your journeys, be sure to visit relix.com/festivals for current listings, news and other festival tips.

Lineups are up-to-date as of press time. If you see an (R) next to a listing, then be sure to visit us at the *Relix* booth onsite

THE SOUNDS OF SUMMER

JUDAH & THE LION

BY JUSTIN JACOBS

The hyphen can be a burden when it comes to new, breakout bands. Being labeled art-punk or post-R&B may deter as many new listeners as it turns on. But then there's Judah & the Lion. Instead of enduring countless, tired descriptors from fans and critics alike, the Nashville quartet took it upon themselves to qualify their sound.

Their latest album is titled *Folk Hop N' Roll*. It's equal parts plucked banjo, banging beats and rock-and-roll guitar—with some truly stadium-sized pop choruses mixed in. That may be an odd combination, but it's struck a major chord: Breakout single "Take It All Back 2.0" topped the Billboard Alternative Songs chart for nearly a month. The band spent this winter opening for Twenty One Pilots, and they're booked on tour through mid-November.

"It's an overwhelming thing for this Tennessee boy," says frontman Judah Akers, calling from a tour stop in Calgary, Canada.

Given the band's humble beginnings, it's hard to blame him. Akers was a student at Nashville's Belmont University with a handful of songs scribbled down. He called a friend of a friend, banjo player Nate Zuercher, for a casual jam. Zuercher brought along mandolinist Brian Macdonald.

"Brian and I were the only banjo and mandolin majors in school," laughs Zuercher. "It wasn't too out of place to get a call like that. But when Judah started playing his songs, we knew it was something else. Like when you meet your wife, you just know. The first downbeat of the first song, I thought, 'I'm in.'"

Along with drummer Spencer Cross, Judah & the Lion first recorded an EP of fairly traditional, Christian-influenced folk music. Quickly, though, they began to change directions—2013's *Sweet Tennessee* was already less overtly faith-based. The four students were (and are) men of faith, but projecting that was having the opposite effect they'd intended.

"Sometimes, when you bring religion into something, it excludes people. It can feel exclusive, even unwelcoming," says Akers. "But we wanted to make music relatable to everyone. And we started writing more about what we all go through as humans. That's what matters."

That wasn't the only shift. While preparing for what would eventually become 2014's *Kids These Days*, a producer pushed the band to toy with a Moog synthesizer on the otherwise gorgeously acoustic "Scared." That experiment didn't make the final cut, but it planted a seed. "By the time we started rehearsing for our tour that year, we were playing with a drum-pad machine. The Moog that day sent us into new territory," says Zuercher. "We wanted to get out of our folk bubble."

With 2016's *Folk Hop N' Roll*, Akers and company were embracing the shift—the album was a wild swerve in style and sound. Throughout tracks like "We Own the Night," the band morphs into a full-on pop machine, as Akers howls over a buzzing guitar riff, sampled vocal clips and a jittery beat. On "Reputation," they offer a convincing early Beastie Boys impression—all blocky beats, hand claps and schoolyard rhymes like, "Six O'Clock, I put my new clothes on/ I wanna look nice so I don't upset my mom." It's silly, sure, but completely smile-inducing.

Judah & the Lion were a well-liked Nashville band that colored within the city's traditional, musical lines for a few years. But after *Folk Hop N' Roll*, they truly started turning heads.

"Bands like Kings of Leon, Cage The Elephant and Moon Taxi—the half of the city that loves those bands started accepting us," says Akers. "And when more than just your mom and friends start showing up, it means a lot."

For Zuercher, the notion of playing banjo in an increasingly non-bluegrass band was exciting, despite its traditionalist reputation. "Everyone and their mom plays guitar in Nashville and has an opinion on the instrument, but everyone's been very open to what I wanted to do on banjo," he says. "Honestly, it's a new area to explore. Bands like Mumford & Sons and The Avett Brothers are also doing new things, but it's a pretty open space."

Zuercher's banjo especially basks in a new light on "Take It All Back." The song was an early crowd favorite with its shouted chorus and simple, torpedoed banjo-plucking. It's built on the same model as The Lumineers' inescapable "Ho Hey"—the version found on *Folk Hop N' Roll* even opens with a crowd sing-along.

Judah & the Lion knew they had a hit. But in the tightened-up "2.0" version, released with the repackaged, deluxe *Folk Hop N' Roll* earlier this year, they'd created a smash. The band's populist formula shows up all over their breakthrough rerelease—heavy, marching percussion, Mumford-style crescendos and lighters-up choruses that'll leave fans going hoarse.

From a Christian bluegrass ensemble to a pack of pop hitmakers, Judah & the Lion have covered a lot of ground in no time. And Akers intends to keep moving. "The new songs we're creating just sound more and more like Judah & the Lion."

Iceland Airwaves
11/1-5 // Reykjavik, Iceland
Mumford & Sons, Fleet Foxes, Billy Bragg, Ama Lou, Benjamin Clementine, Childhood, Lonely Parade, Mahalia, more
icelandairwaves.is

Pitchfork Paris
11/2-4 // Paris, France
The National, Run The Jewels, Ride, Kamasi Washington, BADBADNOTGOOD, Talaboman, The Blaze, Polo & Pan, Jungle, Sylvan Esso, Isaac Delusion, more
pitchforkmusicfestival.fr/en

Ozzfest Meets Knotfest
11/4-5 // San Bernardino, CA
Rob Zombie, Marilyn Manson, Ozzy Osbourne, Prophets of Rage, Deftones, Children of Bodom, more
ozzfestmeetsknotfest.com

Hard Rock Hell
11/9-12 // North Wales, U.K.
Dee Snider, Black Star Riders, Airbourne, Reef, Lynch Mob, Y&T, Femme Fatale, Tyketto, Gun, The Answer, Von Hertzen Brothers, Burnt Out Wreck, Killcode, The Jokers, more
hardrockhell.com

Le Guess Who?
11/9-12 // Utrecht, Netherlands
Pharoah Sanders, Sun Kil Moon, Linton Kwesi Johnson, James Holden & The Animal Spirits, Farida & the Iraqi Maram Ensemble, Perfume Genius, Grouper & Paul Clipson, more
leguesswho.nl

Sound on Sound
11/10-12 // McDade, TX
Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Grizzly Bear, Iggy Pop, The Shins, Blood Orange, Electric Wizard, Pusha T, Kehlani, Vince Staples, Sleep, Ministry, Washed Out, Taking Back Sunday, Real Estate, Dinosaur Jr., more
soundonsoundfest.com

Electric Zoo Countdown Shanghai
11/12 // Shanghai, China
Dada Life, Sander Van Doorn, Hucci, Mako, Oshi, Codeko, Cavia, Fader One, more
electriczoo.kanjian.com

Clockenflap
11/17-19 // Hong Kong, China
Massive Attack, Feist, The Dandy Warhols, Tinariwen, Fan Hung A, Higher Brothers, Dean, Hello Nico, Supper Moment, MØ, Ibibio Sound Machine, Cashmere Cat, Matthew Dear, Bob Moses, more
clockenflap.com

Zen Awakening
11/17-19 // Orlando, FL
Ott, EPROM, Random Rab, Ivy Lab, Great Dane, Yheti, Jade Cicada, Space Kadet, Happy Campers, Psychedelic Monks, more
zenawakeningfestival.com

THE SOUNDS OF SUMMER

TIFT MERRITT

BY MATT INMAN

"I'm not somebody who would have pictured herself going home—going back," Tift Merritt says as she explains her recent decision to return to Raleigh, N.C. "I like the frontier—being ahead." But, as it turns out, the North Carolina-bred singer-songwriter had a selfless reason to give up her adopted New York City stomping grounds and relocate to her old hometown—the arrival of her now one-year-old daughter, Jean.

"This was not a glamorous decision," Merritt admits. "It was a practical decision." She speaks passionately about being able to give her daughter access to the outdoors and be in closer proximity to her grandparents, along with the community of people that Merritt-herself has known since she was a child.

"I don't generally like the middle ground—I like big cities and I like being out in the country," Merritt adds. "A sense of place is something that I'm always after in my writing, and I tend to enjoy being in unique places that are steeped in their individuality. I also like changing environments. It's really important to get out of your work mindset or social norms—just getting back to essentials, like being smack dab in the middle of a city or going way out in the country on a ranch all by yourself. There is something about stripping life back beyond the niceties and the assumptions that's really great for writing."

As evidenced by her new LP, *Stitch of the World*, Merritt isn't a stranger to moving around—the album was written all around the country, from a cabin in California to a farm in Texas and back in New York. That hint of wanderlust is something that Merritt is keen on instilling in her daughter. Jean has already accompanied her on multiple touring runs. In between the recording and releasing of *Stitch of the World*, Merritt went out on the road for stints in both Andrew Bird's Hands of Glory and fellow North Carolinian M.C. Taylor's Hiss Golden Messenger.

"It does affect everything," Merritt says of having a baby on board while touring. "First of all, I can't just tour to death like I've done in the past. And if it gets to the point to where this is something that she hates, then I'm not going to do it. That's a good thing for me, too. There's a circuit out there that I've been on for a really long time, and you kind of think that being in the trenches is going to automatically equal forward motion. I don't know if that's true anymore."

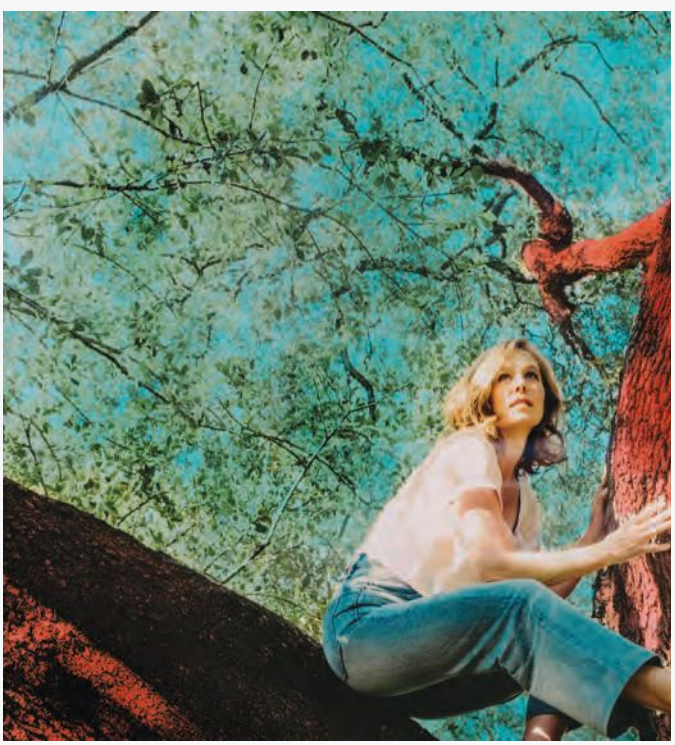
Overall, Merritt says, the baby-on-tour experience has been positive, and her bandmates, including Bird and Taylor, helped her realize that. "When you begin having rock-and-roll dreams with your small, vulnerable, infant daughter, you kind of feel like an awful person. [My bandmates] are extremely important to me, because they are so supportive. They just cheered me on—and there were rough moments. They were like, 'You're doing it! Jean's loving it!' In that time, I realized I have to do it because, every time I came home, Jean would make a leap forward. This adventure is great for her, to see more than just her nursery at home. At this time in her life, she's taking things in more quickly than she ever will. It's fun to be able to show her different places and different people."

The adventure started in the studio when Merritt recorded the new album in Los Angeles—with the help of old friend Sam Beam of Iron & Wine—while she was six months pregnant. And though the songs were mostly written before her pregnancy, Merritt says Jean was influencing her music even then.

"There is a level of sharing that is really interesting when you're pregnant," she adds. "It puts new insight on sharing with an audience. It's such an intimate thing. I also think that being pregnant is a time when emotions are high and there's a lot of uncertainty. It's just a humongous leap of faith. And, in a smaller way, that's what making a record is, too. That's what music is. It is a big leap of faith, and you just have to jump. Somebody said something really nice to me about being a mom: You have to be patient and you're going to have these limitations, but the creativity inside of you doesn't go away."

Now, back in Raleigh, Merritt is trying to plot out the next steps in her career and her family. Merritt couldn't be happier to be in that position, and while she figures that it won't be long until she gets "the itch" to make more music—which may mean more wandering—for the time being, her hometown is more than enough.

"I think a lot about [writer] Eudora Welty, who's one of my heroes," Merritt says. "She always lived in Jackson, Miss. She even lived in the same house and looked out the same window. And she never ran out of things to write about, never ran out of stories to tell. A friend of mine describes it like this: 'The roots of the tree are as big as the tree itself.' And it's really important to pay attention to those. I've got some rich history here, and there's no substitute for that."



Corona Capital
11/18–19 // Mexico City, Mexico
Foo Fighters, The xx, PJ Harvey, Elbow, Cage the Elephant, Green Day, Phoenix, The Shins, Grizzly Bear, Cold War Kids, Grouplove, Sampha, alt-J, more
coronacapital.com.mx

Goldrush
11/18–19 // Chandler, AZ
Marshmello, Migos, Dillon Francis, Lil Uzi Vert, RL Grime, Hippie Sabotage, Excision, more
goldrushfestaz.com

Dreamstate SoCal
11/24–25 // San Bernardino, CA
Ace Ventura, Armin Van Buuren, Alpha 9, BLiSS, Future Frequency, Roger Shah, Gaia, Marco V, more
dreamstateusa.com

Dominican Holidaze
12/1–5 //
Punta Cana, Dominican Republic
The Disco Biscuits, STS9, Umphrey's McGee, GRiZ, Joe Russo's Almost Dead, Lotus, The Motet, TAUK, Spafford, SunSquabi, Wolf + Lamb, Brendan Bayliss
dominicanholidaze.com

Island of Light
12/7–10 //
Fajardo, Puerto Rico
Pretty Lights, Thievery Corporation, Atmosphere, Gramatik, Tycho, Cut Copy, Lettuce, Emancipator Ensemble, The Floozies, Ganja White Night, more
islandoflight.com

Strings & Sol
12/8–12 //
Puerto Morelos, Mexico
Yonder Mountain String Band, Greensky Bluegrass, Railroad Earth, Leftover Salmon, The Infamous Stringdusters, Fruition, more
stringsandsol.com

Closer to the Sun
12/13–17 // Puerto Morelos, Mexico
Slightly Stoopid, SOJA, Stick Figure, J Boog, Fortunate Youth, more
closertothesun.com

SnowGlobe
12/29–31 //
South Lake Tahoe, CA
Lineup TBA
snowglobemusicfestival.com

Holy Ship!
1/6–10 & 1/10–13 //
Port Canaveral, FL
Lineup TBA
holyship.com

Dave Matthews and Tim Reynolds
1/12–14 // Riviera Maya, Mexico
Dave Matthews and Tim Reynolds, more daveandtimrivieramaya.com

Jill Furmonovsky

THE SOUNDS OF SUMMER

CATFISH AND THE BOTTLEMEN

BY SEAN HERSCH

Catfish and the Bottlemen's Van McCann still feels that pure, far-from-jaded passion every time he steps onstage. "Nothing beats it. I love it," the U.K. singer says of his group's lengthy summer tour, which included prime festival spots and marquee headlining dates. "We're about to play Stubb's for two and a half hours—crazy Texans going absolutely nuts in the red-hot heat. The first time we were here, we were supporting J. Roddy Walston and The Business. I'm in my Stubb's shirt from when I was here two years ago. As long as we don't pass out because of the heat, it will probably be one of the best of the tour. It's beautiful. It's a gorgeous tour."

McCann, whose parents ran a bed and breakfast in Llandudno, Wales, co-founded Catfish and the Bottlemen in 2007 and the group played their first gig at another B&B run by an early band member's family. Since those low-key early days, the alt-rock act—whose lineup also includes Benji Blakeway, Johnny Bond and Robert Hall—have grown into true global stars and the epitome of the heartfelt, big-stage, modern summer sound. After making a splash in the U.K., they signed with homegrown tastemakers Communion and released their debut, *The Balcony*, in 2014. Two years later, they moved over to Capitol and dropped their crossover smash *The Ride*, which spawned the singles "7" and "Soundcheck." The Catfish have been equally successful on the live front too, harnessing both the anthemic energy of their festival crowds and the raw punk spirit of their early days that helped them score a recent string of support dates for Green Day, including one at Pasadena, Calif.'s massive Rose Bowl Stadium.

McCann recently had a full-circle moment when the group played a few dates down under in Australia. "For me, there's kind of a 360-degree magic air that I get when I get off the plane [in Australia] because my mom and dad got married in St. Dominic's Church in Sydney," he says, noting that his favorite Van Morrison song is "Saint Dominic's Preview." The singer adds that his first musical memory was seeing an Australian busker named Catfish and the Bottlemen perform on the street—the indelible moment that inspired his band's moniker.

McCann is a fan of Australia's progressive approach to music marketing, too. "The Australia radio stations are unreal. They pick what singles they want; they don't care what single we're promoting or releasing. They've played like eight different songs [of ours] this year."

In between festival stops at BottleRock, Isle of Wight and Mad Cool, the group has been toying with another batch of songs. "We'd love to release an album as soon as possible. We've got it written; we just need some time to do it now," McCann says. "Once we give the green light to our management and label, we'll be going again. In terms of [the band], we're excited. The stuff we got for the next one is really good. If it was up to us, then we'd release an album every six months but, luckily, we have the support of fans who want us to keep touring behind the last one."

And, even as Catfish conquers bigger stages, McCann still vividly remembers the passion of those performances that inspired him so many shows ago.

"When we were younger, Benji got me into Kings of Leon and he sent me this performance of them playing at Bonnaroo in 2004," he gushes. "They're fucking going nuts—they're being compelled or something, like they're being taken over by a god. So when we turned up at Bonnaroo for the first time, I remember feeling like, 'Benji, remember Kings of Leon, mate?' It's like the preacher speaks and takes over the body of someone. You've been cleansed."

THE SOUNDS OF SUMMER

MICHAEL KIWANUKA

BY MATT INMAN

Earlier this year, HBO released the hit miniseries *Big Little Lies* to widespread acclaim, and throughout its seven-episode run, viewers were treated to a stellar soundtrack anchored by a stunning opening credits sequence that was backed by North London-bred singer Michael Kiwanuka's "Cold Little Heart." And while those watching may have wondered who was behind the throwback voice set to a modern beat, Kiwanuka was just as surprised by the song's prominence in the show.

"I thought it was just going to be a tiny bit of the song in some tiny scene," he says. "I didn't pay that much attention at the time, but when it came out, people were posting on my Instagram and Twitter. I saw a boost of followers and activity. I was like, 'What's happening?' It was amazing."

The song—which is a nearly 10-minute sonic journey, though only a portion of the latter half was used by HBO—was taken from Kiwanuka's sophomore album, last year's *Love & Hate*. Arriving a full four years after his debut effort, *Home Again*, the record showcases a more refined musician willing to experiment with instrumentation and production, which is just what Kiwanuka wanted to accomplish with his second outing—and part of why it took so long for him to release it.

"The first few albums for any artist are pretty important," Kiwanuka admits. "That's when you're stating your personality and putting out who you are. It takes some time to make sure you're doing it in the correct way; otherwise, it can be difficult to change people's minds. I wanted to make sure what I heard through the speakers was what I wanted people to hear."

Kiwanuka says his goal for *Love & Hate* was to make more of a soul album than his folk-leaning debut; he wanted to "try something more funky." To that end, the singer hooked up with uber-producer Brian Burton, better known as Danger Mouse, who helped Kiwanuka bring his vision to lush and expansive fruition by workshopping the tracks with him in the studio.

"It was much more of a visceral experience, which made the sound change a bit and the mood different," Kiwanuka says. "On top of that, I wanted to showcase a different side of me. I wanted to make it a harder record in terms of sonics and lyric content, and the singing as well. I wanted every part of it to feel a bit more intense."

Though Kiwanuka experienced some quick success around the time of his first record—including being named BBC Sound of 2012, receiving a Mercury Prize nomination and garnering slots at festivals from Fuji Rock to Bonnaroo—he was still searching for his place in the music world. That lingering feeling of self-doubt is audible through many of the lyrics of *Love & Hate*.

"Those few years were definitely a yearning, searching kind of time as an artist—or just as a human being," Kiwanuka says. "The songs I was coming out with were very much [about] looking for ways to overcome things, to understand who I am. It's definitely melancholy, and that kind of yearning for satisfaction was a huge influence on the sound. I wanted to just get rid of the dark side."

Also during that time, Kiwanuka had an unexpected experience that caused him to question his talent yet, at the same time, left him with a renewed energy to create. He was finishing up a tour with Alabama Shakes when he got a call inviting him to Hawaii to go into the studio with Kanye West for the sessions that would yield West's Grammy-winning *Yeezus*.

"It was a crazy, exciting, weird week," Kiwanuka remembers. "I had a great time, but I feel like when you're going to work with someone like that, you have to be comfortable and clear with who you are. Otherwise, you just get so overwhelmed by the superstardom of the moment because there are these genius artists and people walking around that are doing well, and I'm just kind of finding my feet."

Although his contributions didn't make it onto the album, Kiwanuka considers the experience, in hindsight, to be fruitful. "I still always reference it in my head when I'm in the studio," he says. "[Kanye] was up for 24 hours in the studio working on whatever—he was just always working—and he was welcoming and friendly. I feel like he could see my potential more than I could myself. He told me I had something. I probably didn't even believe it then."

Kiwanuka clearly looks up to West, but the more common comparisons and influences tied to his soulful music usually fall along the lines of Otis Redding, Marvin Gaye and The Temptations. However, on *Love & Hate*, Kiwanuka is careful not to imitate his idols, hoping to construct his own trademark sound instead.

"All of those guys, my favorite artists—like Kanye West or Bill Withers or whatever—they have their identity, and who they are is so strong in what they do, so they find their own sound," Kiwanuka says. "For me, I like the comparisons, but one day, I just hope to have it where people hear a song of mine, and they're like, 'Oh, that sounds like a Michael Kiwanuka tune.' It's good—and it's flattering—but I want to just keep going deeper."

Island Exodus 9
1/13-17 // Runaway Bay, Jamaica
Gov't Mule, Warren Haynes "solo," JJ Grey & Mofro, Audley Freed & Ron Holloway, more
islandexodus.com

(R) Jam Cruise 16
1/17-22 // Miami, FL
Medeski Scofield Martin & Wood, Galactic, Karl Denson's Tiny Universe, Maceo Parker, Lotus, Gramatik, more
jamcruise.com

ShipRocked
1/21-25 // Port Canaveral, FL
Stone Sour, Seether, In This Moment, Black Label Society, more
shiprocked.com

Gem & Jam
1/25-28 // Tucson, AZ
STS9, Greensky Bluegrass, Lettuce, Railroad Earth, Emancipator, Breaking Biscuits, more
gemandjamfestival.com

Panic En La Playa Siete
1/26-30 //
Riviera Maya, Mexico
Widespread Panic, David Shaw, Marcus King, Playa Allstars, Zambi Allstars, more
panicenlaplaya.com

The Rock Boat
1/30- 2/4 //
New Orleans, LA
Sister Hazel, Barenaked Ladies, NEEDTOBREATHE, Will Hoge, Drew Holcomb & The Neighbors, more
therockboat.com

Avett Brothers at the Beach
1/31-2/4 //
Riviera Maya, Mexico
The Avett Brothers, Old Crow Medicine Show, John Prine, The Head and The Heart, more
avettsatthebeach.com

Dead & Company's Playing in the Sand
2/15-18 // Riviera Maya, Mexico
Dead & Company
playinginthesand.com

One Big Holiday
3/2-6 // Punta Cana, Dominican Republic
My Morning Jacket, Portugal.The Man, Nathaniel Rateliff & The Night Sweats, Spoon, Broken Social Scene, Toots and The Maytals, Preservation Hall Jazz Band, Sylvan Esso, Moon Taxi, J. Roddy Walston and The Business, Hurray for the Riff Raff, more
mmjonebigholiday.com

BACK TO THE GARDEN

With *Woodstock*, their first album in four years, Portugal. The Man have harnessed festival nation's multi-genre, kaleidoscopic spirit into an improv-friendly mixtape.

BY MIKE GREENHAUS

IN 1997, PANTERA rolled into Anchorage, Alaska, and the experience melted Zachary Carothers' mind. The seminal moment arrived just a few minutes into the metal titans' show: During "Cowboys From Hell," Pantera's opening number, the group moved into what was supposed to be a very scripted section. But, instead of offering that specific guitar riff, Dimebag Darrell drifted into a taste of Ted Nugent's "Cat Scratch Fever" before segueing back into "Cowboys From Hell." The mash-up only lasted a few seconds, but left an indelible mark on Carothers and his future bandmate John Gourley, laying the groundwork for one of Portugal. The Man's signature moves.

"It was fucking awesome," Carothers says, still visibly turned on by the night. "We realized we could blend covers into our songs. It's fun to let people know where things come from, especially when a song inspires us to write another song."

It's an overcast June afternoon, on the eve of festival season's summer peak, and Portugal. The Man's principals are sprawled out in a conference room at Atlantic Records' New York office. The windows overlooking Midtown Manhattan's corporate epicenter highlight just how far the ensemble has come since they first coalesced around Wasilla, Alaska. Yet, the three members of Portugal on hand today seem immune to the hustle and bustle of their surroundings. At the moment, Gourley—the group's lead singer, guitarist and primary songwriter—is considering getting a tattoo. (He decides to go with some Charli XCX ink that he later updates into the freedom of speech slogan, "Je suis Charlie.") Carothers, the band's genial, talkative bassist, is lounging comfortably to his right and sporting one of the band's insider-only "P" baseball caps. Guitarist Eric Howk is sitting to Gourley's left. Though he only officially joined Portugal in 2015, Howk knew Gourley and Carothers when they were growing up in the Alaskan wilderness and has been in the band's orbit for years. An empty wheelchair is waiting by Howk's side—he's been paralyzed from the sternum down since he fell into an unmarked hole at a construction site in 2007, but he continues to tour and perform live.

All three musicians are antsy to get back on the road and are especially ready to hit Bonnaroo, where the perennial indie-psych favorites have grown into one of The Farm's unofficial house bands. Over the years, Gourley, Carothers and their compadres have played late night-barn burners, participated in pop-up parades and even jammed with Weird Al Yankovic. They're only able to make a brief stopover this year, which they see as both a blessing and a curse; in the past, they may have enjoyed their time in Manchester, Tenn., a bit too much.

Portugal. The Man share a kinetic energy with the famously eclectic Roo, mixing elements of rock, pop, jam, electronica, metal and hip-hop in a wholly original way. Perhaps, more than ever, they embraced that seamless blend of styles and packaged those diverse sounds into a crisp, main-stage-ready release on their eighth studio-album, *Woodstock*.

"It's meant to feel like a festival," Gourley says. "We wanted it to feel like a CD binder—when you actually had CDs in your car, and you'd throw on some Motown and then you'd follow that up with Beastie Boys, then Missy Elliot. We wanted to have [elements] of all the things we'd listened to growing up and do them in a way that felt very organic."

Woodstock, fittingly, opens with a snippet of Richie Havens' "Freedom" invocation from the 1969 event at the start of "Number One" and proceeds to jump between radio-ready bangers, delicately crafted headphone collages and wild, soulful jams at the pace that one might bounce between Bonnaroo stages. It makes sense, too: At a time when the festival scene has become increasingly dominated by wide-reaching, anthemic pop and electronic artists, Portugal. The Man are the rare connection to the scene's colorful indie-jam roots that still sounds very much in line with this summer's soundtrack.

"There's a lot of really obvious and deliberate sampling on the record," Gourley says, pointing to a moment where Philly R&B/blues artist Son Little pops up on "Number One." "As soon as I put [a bit of Havens' 'Freedom'] in there, everyone was like, 'I'm pretty sure that's gonna be hard to clear.' Ultimately, his estate was great, which is so fucking cool because I had heard this story about Quentin Tarantino trying to clear that sample for *Django Unchained* and it being insanely difficult. I feel so privileged to have that on our record—it's a great thing to give the kids. People should look up that performance. It's my favorite performance of all time."

> "It's meant to feel like a festival. We wanted it to feel like a CD binder."
> JOHN GOURLEY

* * *

PORTUGAL. THE MAN GREW OUT OF Anatomy of a Ghost, a hardcore screamo group that featured Gourley and Carothers and disbanded in 2004. At first, Gourley considered Portugal something of a side-project—assisted by Carothers and a drum machine—but, over time, it grew into his primary focus. They cycled through numerous members and a few slight stylistic variances during Portugal's early years, gradually building a loyal, grassroots fanbase from touring and annual new releases. Throughout, Gourley's falsetto vocals and cryptic-yet-catchy lyrics have floated over the band's tight, art-pop grooves.

Gourley and Carothers may have spent their professional careers living in the hipster capital of Portland, Ore., but the duo credit their Alaskan upbringing with keeping their love of music pure and their tastes eclectic. The band wagers that there are actually more Metallica tattoos per capita in Anchorage than pretty much anywhere outside of South America.

"It's a special place," Carothers says. "If you are a band and you come up there, you are automatically loved. We see that when we play small towns—people are really grateful. Obviously, playing New York City is amazing, but people are seeing more shows in a night than we got in months."

The bassist's eyes light up as he describes his first concert, Primus, when he was 12. "I danced like I had never heard music before because I had never fucking *heard music* before," he says with a grin. "It was fucking rad."

"John's dad always saves the day—he has a million times," Carothers says of the last-minute shifts that led to their new album.

Maclay Heriot

Even early on, Portugal. The Man strove to create extended suites that glide through styles and songs like progressing through the levels of a video game. Gourley points to an early trip to Germany where they used the old trick they learned from Pantera to extend their set in new, interesting ways.

"In a very German way, they asked us to play at least an hour and we had a 40-minute CD," he says. "The first night, we played a couple songs twice and just started extending things—I would just start singing Beatles lyrics, whatever came to my mind. We started seeing transitions within the songs, leading you to the next point. That's what music is about. I want to show people what we listen to, the way we listen to music and the way we hear it—to give something for other bands to strive for."

In 2010, Portugal signed with Atlantic, who issued the John Hill-produced *In the Mountain in the Cloud* the next year. From there, they partnered with Danger Mouse for 2013's *Evil Friends*. Portugal. The Man's major-label backers and big-name producers didn't really change the group's sound, yet they slightly polished and tightened it, emphasizing the vocal hooks, psych-rock freak-outs and funky beats that have always been part of their DNA. Those breakthrough albums also arrived at a time when the lines between indie, pop and hip-hop started to blur across the board. Singles like "Got It All (This Can't Be Living Now)," "So American," "Evil Friends," "Purple Yellow Red and Blue" and "Modern Jesus" managed to embrace modern production techniques and electronic elements while using those tropes as touchstones to reference and reclaim.

While supporting *Evil Friends*, Portugal. The Man toured with Chris Black, an actual MC and hype-man, who would intro the band and energize the crowd. His presence even caught members of the band by surprise and signified that the group takes their love of rap seriously.

"I didn't even know he was coming," Howk says. "It was my first show with the guys in a long time and, suddenly, this giant guy walks up like, 'Y'all ready to turn it up?' And I was like, 'I guess I am, sir!' He's philosopher smart. When you get him one-on-one, he'll talk at length about anything."

In 2013, Portugal. The Man started working on the material that would eventually surface as *Woodstock*. Their initial sessions were somewhat piecemeal; they took advantage of their various offers and spent an uncharacteristically long period of time on their projects, recording separately with both Danger Mouse and the Beastie Boys' Mike D. Gourley credits Mike D with pulling out some of his most esoteric sounds while they channeled the spirit of The Band at Rick Rubin's idyllic Shangri-La Studios. Working alongside their heroes inspired the group to write a handful of their catchiest tunes, but they didn't have a real timeline or end date. In their words, they got lost in "The Matrix."

"We all have the same goal—that's where I think this band is different than other bands," Gourley says. "We genuinely want to be objective and we want to write the best songs we can. So, every time we sit down to go after something, it's more about focusing and finding what makes that song great. We're not really the type of band that just rips the tops off our heads and can throw out all these things and work like that. We all want to make the best record possible. I'm not an uncertain dude; none of us are uncertain people. We don't come up with a song and go, 'Oh, I don't know. Is it good?' It either is or it isn't."

It took a trip to visit Gourley's father—a contractor who moved his family around Alaska to work on various projects—to get the band back on track. The musicians describe him as a practical man who leads a practical life. "John's dad always saves the day—he has a million times," Carothers says. "We just couldn't stop writing, and he asked us what is taking so long. It was the way he put it: 'Don't you guys just go into a studio, bring your instruments, record some songs?' We didn't want to argue too much."

"That's what I was raised with," Gourley adds. "Every time my dad says something like that to me, I sit down and go, 'Yeah, you're right.' He basically wrote 'So American,' just by sitting down and watching a Pete Seeger documentary with me, saying, 'You know what, Johnny? I haven't heard a good protest song in a while. Can you write one of those?' There's just something about the way he puts things—it just made me think about the reason I play music. We lived two hours from town and had to drive to get groceries. My family would listen to oldies radio the entire drive and sing along. It's all of those memories that made me want to play music."

Gourley's father also inspired *Woodstock*'s title. The elder Gourley attended the original Woodstock and loved to screen the concert film on VHS for his son. During Portugal's recent visit to Alaska, he also showed the band his Woodstock ticket stub.

"Watching Ritchie Havens open up Woodstock was the first real performance I had ever seen," Gourley says before trailing off. "Seeing how beat up his guitar was and watching him deliver something that real—that's as raw as it gets. It's improv, and it's everything that this band is about."

The fortuitous trip back home overlapped with the

tense political climate around last year's presidential election. The parallels with the late-'60s and early-'70s—the period Woodstock epitomized—weren't lost on Gourley.

"When we picked that name, pretty much everybody we told was like, 'Ah no, you can't do that,'" he says. "But I said, 'I actually think we should.'"

Despite the longest stretch between releases of his career, Gourley decided to scrap much of the recorded material, which they had tentatively titled *Gloomin + Doomin,* in favor of crafting a new batch of tunes with Hill. Then, they wove in songs and stems from their previous sessions with Danger Mouse ("Number One," the slightly apocalyptic "So Young" and the groovy "Mr Lonely," which features a hip-hop breakdown from Fat Lip) and Mike D (the dance-floor-approved "Noise Pollution") that held together as a cohesive suite of music. The result is their most accessible release and among their densest. The EDM underbelly of "Easy Tiger" moves like both a reaction to and celebration of an all-night festival set, the lyrical twists and keyboard playfulness of "Rich Friends" make the cut a classic, old-school P.TM nugget and "Tidal Wave" may inspire a few samples of its own.

A slew of guest musicians, outside producers, studio hands and Facebook friends also contributed to the process, including longtime Portugal pal Casey Bates and Electric Guest's Asa Taccone. The band members describe their recording process as inherently social. If someone is tired, then they will bring in someone else with some new energy—or, as they say with a collective laugh, if a friend happened to play saxophone in high school, then they might as well trade them some beer for their services. On one track, every musician in the studio took a turn playing the same guitar solo, and others even sent in the same part remotely. "There are so many little moments on the record where I'm like, 'Did I play that? Did you play that? Eh, it doesn't matter,'" Howk quips. A range of samples—some more subversive than others—dot the album, pointing to the group's influences and giving the LP a punchy, mixtape feel. "There some *Where's Waldo* covers," he adds. "In one section of one song, I dip into Weezer's 'Say It Ain't So.'"

Gourley, who says he forgets he is a musician when he visits Alaska, enjoying his second home on The Farm, 6/9/17.

Woodstock's playbill of guests rivals Michael Jackson's famously large-scale *Thriller* credits. But Gourley is quick to point out that the album's best moments came about much more organically.

"'Feel It Still' happened completely out of nowhere," he says of *Woodstock*'s funky, soulful top-shelf single. "I stepped into a side room, Asa was in there, and we just started playing this bassline—this cool groove. We threw that song down in maybe an hour. That's the way it should be—us writing music because we feel like it, because it was something that needed to come out."

* * *

IT'S FRIDAY NIGHT AT BONNAROO and U2 is about to wrap up their set on the What Stage. The members of Portugal. The Man—Gourley, Carothers, Howk, keyboardist Kyle O'Quin and drummer Jason Sechrist—and their entourage are hanging out behind This Tent, sipping some beer and wine. In a few minutes, they'll launch into a late-night barn burner of a show that will reference material by such diverse influences as Metallica, The Beatles, Oasis and Pink Floyd, and include cameos from members of Cage The Elephant and longtime scene photographer Danny Clinch.

They'd hoped to bring out Trey Anastasio Band's Jennifer Hartswick and Natalie Cressman, who were on-site for surprise sit-ins with the livetronica duo Big Gigantic, but, unfortunately, the timing didn't work out. In March, Portugal. The Man released "Feel It Still" as a *Woodstock* teaser, and Trey Anastasio quickly added the song to his band's set. The cover turned a new audience onto Portugal. The Man's music; in certain ways, they scored an old-school jukebox hit. Howk says he was sitting in his backyard in Seattle when his neighbor, who is a Phishhead, broke the news. "He popped over the fence and was like, 'Hey, check it out! You guys made it!'" he says.

Gourley says he gets texts and tweets every time Anastasio plays the song. He's seen the impact that the cover has had on Portugal. The Man's fanbase, too. "My dad met a group of 15 kids when we played Albany who only knew us and bought tickets because Trey covered that song," he says. "When he saw them after, they were freaking out about the show."

Though Sechrist is the band's resident jamband aficionado and on-tour Grateful Dead DJ, Carothers has some fond touring memories of his own.

"When I was 18, I took a trip around the country," he says. "I bumped into a bunch of friends and we did three nights of Widespread Panic over Halloween in New Orleans and went up and saw some Phish shows. I enjoyed it live, but I never took it home with me."

Howk sees Phish and the Dead's recent resurgence as part of an overall shift in modern listening habits where genres or styles no longer divide fans. "Now, you can pull up a crazy Trey Anastasio guitar solo at a Phish concert on YouTube and be blown away by it instead of having to go to a show and see the entire scene," he says.

They all agree that once they bring a song into their live set, they are more concerned with the energy and spirit of it than actually recreating the studio sound.

"It's how we do our covers too," Gourley says. "Kyle [the band's in-house musical scholar] can hop on me all he fucking wants about a song being in E-minor 7, but I'm going to be like, 'Well, I'm going to learn it like this.' Playing live, you should do it different every night. Dick Dale is the best at that shit."

Despite his background in punk and harder-edged music, Gourley sees the jam scene's commitment to nurturing passionate audiences as part of his ultimate goal. And he sees Portugal as heirs to the open-eared, dedicated music scene that the modern festival has helped foster.

"My Morning Jacket, The National, even Spoon a little bit—these are groups where it's all built around the live presence," he says. "They just pump out records and play these shows that people genuinely fall in love with. We are never able to see other people's shows anymore but, if we did, I always felt that we would 100 percent be one of those fans. And we'd like to think that we can include ourselves in that group of bands, too."

RENEGADE DAYS REVISITED

Steve Earle looks back at his country roots with *So You Wannabe an Outlaw*

BY HOLLY GLEASON

Chad Barka

CONSIDERING THAT HE'S NOW 22 years sober from a cross-addiction cocktail that could rival Keith Richards' and has survived seven weddings *and* divorces—two with the same woman—it's odd to hear Steve Earle talking about death. And, as he roars back with the brazen country *So You Wannabe an Outlaw*, it's not merely contemplation inspired by losing old friend and noted Texas songwriter Guy Clark last year, though that loss clearly inspired *Outlaw*'s "Good-Bye Michelangelo." This rumination is a practical, life-informing consideration that's settled long after the 62 year old's dangerous living was done.

"It was coming from a long time," he offers, his equanimity about losing a key mentor underscored by a dark laugh. "There were people who thought I'd be gone a long time before Guy."

Dressed in a black T-shirt, dark jeans that hang a little slack and Ariat boots, there's nothing you'd notice about the guy with the trimmed beard except the penetrating eyes that are always moving. Earle's intelligence is acute, and it almost drives him.

Gathering his thoughts on a beat-up leather sofa in a sprawling rehearsal studio by Nashville's Cumberland River, Earle does what he does best: plows on with his narrative. "I spend a lot of my life preparing to die. I follow Ram Dass—for the last 20 years, reading his writing about preparing. I practice yoga every day and go to the gym. I have my 12-Step programs. But if you ask Ram Dass, he'd say, 'You're not supposed to do anything.'"

It seems unthinkable for Earle to stand still. Since breaking through at 31 with the porous blue-collar rock-country *Guitar Town*, the San Antonio-raised songwriter showed a predilection for action. Even during what he's referred to as his "vacation in the ghetto," he managed to get busted with heroin and a gun, ending up doing jail time; that's where sobriety took root. Along the way, he's written a play, a book of short stories and a novel, had his own label, been an aggressive anti-death penalty activist, produced Joan Baez, acted in HBO's acclaimed *The Wire* and *Treme* (as well as writing and recording songs for both of those) and contributed to the acclaimed film *Dead Man Walking*.

Stillness seems impossible. Even musically, he's restless. His body of work leans toward rock (*The Revolution Starts Now, The Hard Way, I Feel Alright)*, straight-up bluegrass (*The Mountain* with the Del McCoury Band), post-hip hop (*Washington Square Serenade*) and folk (*Train a Comin'*). It makes his return to country—something left far behind—somehow both surprising *and* inevitable.

"I made a country record *on purpose*," he concedes, making sure that his intentions are spelled out. "*The Low Highway* was more of a folkie-country record, based on *Harvest* and *After the Gold Rush.* This one is about rehabilitating the term 'outlaw.' It was the name of a compilation record, but it was really about artistic freedom. *That's* what it's about."

Earle should know. While on the verge of dropping out of high school, Doug Sahm moved into Earle's neighborhood. Earle watched the storied icon behind "She's About a Mover" tell Atlantic Records' Jerry Wexler to sign Willie Nelson, who was back in Texas decompressing from Music City's Music Row machine. That conversation resulted in the groundbreaking *Shotgun Willie* and *Phases and Stages*. Earle was at Nelson's first Dripping Springs Reunion, the precursor to the legendary Fourth of July Picnics, where "everybody was kinda eyeballing each other. It was a big failure—maybe that's what everybody forgets. But it was Tom T. Hall, Charlie Rich—right as 'Behind Closed Doors' was breaking—Willie, Waylon. Johnny Bush was there."

* * *

LONG BEFORE "OUTLAW" WAS a charged marketing term, it was being defined by flops and fiascos. Earle—a kid who bailed on high school to keep from getting beaten up by rednecks—was finding his place in the crowd of erstwhile writers, pickers and outliers. Fluent in the ways of rural kids, cowboys and hippie-fringe types who flaunted convention, ultimately, it was the music that set his course.

"My heroes were The Beatles and the Stones and John Sebastian for a period of time in the 9TH grade," he explains. "And then, all of a sudden, I found there were these people that were closer to me. I knew a lot about Townes Van Zandt; I heard about him. I never saw him play because [Townes] never came to San Antonio. You know, I sort of had a bad case of Jerry Jeff Walker worship for a moment."

Between the local Texas songwriters, KOKE, the progressive country station and Houston's Pacifica Radio outlet, the seeds were sown. There was a rift happening in Texas—one defined in part by music.

Earle laughs at his brashness. "I crashed Jerry Jeff's 33rd birthday party. I heard it was way out on North Lamar. I'd hitchhiked there, so I didn't have a car. I was talking this girl into driving out there. I told her we were invited. I sorta imagined Jerry Jeff had just spotted me, and was about to throw me out, when Townes came crashing through the door and got everybody's attention, and saved me..."

There's almost a pause. Earle, who's working on his memoir, recognizes the gap between hard facts and reality. Half a beat has passed. "Well, that's the way I remember it. I'm not sure if it's true."

It would be another three months before Townes Van Zandt would heckle the long-haired young man during a set at the iconic Old Quarter with requests for "Wabash Cannonball." Earle, never one to flinch or back down, had another idea: a spot-on version of TVZ's very complex "Mr. Mudd and Mr. Gold."

A friendship began—one that sustained Earle through a tentative move to Music City, an extended period of running into walls professionally and the introduction to Guy Clark, as well as fellow young buck Rodney Crowell. *Heartworn Highways*, the recently resurfaced documentary about the Texas/roots fringe in '70s Nashville, shows a kid, ambitious, cocky, straining to get his hands on the dream. Just as important, it reveals a songwriter smart enough to maintain some semblance of cool to keep his place in this court of top-shelf songwriters who were shaping the careers of Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Emmylou Harris and Johnny Cash.

When Earle arrived in '74, Clark deemed country as "one long commercial for CB radios." It was in the wake of *Urban Cowboy*, and on the surface things were bleak. But below the surface, the Outlaws were becoming their own kind of country. And the long drawling youth leaned into that ethos.

"I'm a post-Bob Dylan songwriter. My whole generation is and we were doing it on purpose. Kris [Kristofferson] is a post-Dylan songwriter, and he *knew* that kind of poetry would work in country music. [Mickey] Newbury made Kris believe [he could do it], and we *all*, Townes, Guy, me, believed *because of* Kris. Kris Kristofferson has a lot to *do* with *all* of us being here."

That merging of moments and hard truths, tough decisions and rough realizations has tempered

The old-school outlaw finds some new fans: Steve Earle at Arrington, Va.'s Lockn' in 2015

Dean Budnick

"My politics are born completely and totally of romance. What I hate about the Republicans more than anything is their pragmatism."
STEVE EARLE

his songwriting. From the bleary-eyed kid in the all-night quick-stop of *Guitar Town*'s "Someday" to the third-generation contrabander growing dope in "Copperhead Road," and from the lobbyists killing time in "Christmas in Washington" to the disheveled, disaffected young Americans fighting for the Taliban in "John Walker's Blues," Earle has sought the details that defined his characters from the inside out—and offered insight into how the outsiders and those left behind feel.

In a world where the personal is political, Earle's politics have often been out front. An aggressive opponent of the death penalty and supporter of pro-choice rights, he's been a host on the now-defunct, liberal talk-radio network Air America. Though the election of Donald Trump—which he referred to with a flat "This is for Dickhead," while introducing "City of Immigrants" during his SiriusXM Outlaw Country broadcast—would seem to call for an overtly political record, Earle drew on the politics of his own life.

Beyond the co-opting of the term "outlaw," the 62-year-old songwriter is once again facing single life. Having finalized his divorce from singer-songwriter Allison Moorer, Earle is learning the tides of a life on his own—that is as "on his own" as a touring musician, who acts and writes, can be.

"My politics are born completely and totally of romance," Earle begins. "What I hate about the Republicans more than anything is their pragmatism. Capitalism exists; it's a force of nature, not an ideology. Mistaking it for that is being too fucking lazy to form an ideology. It's like people confuse romance and sex. Romance is about things being the way they should be, and the refusal to accept things the way they are. We made this record in December, and I thought Hillary Clinton—not my choice, but the better of the two—was going to be president when I was writing and I thought maybe I needed to go write some political songs, but these songs go together. And sometimes you *do* that; I figure I've earned the right. These last two records are a lot about my divorce, adjusting to being alone. To me, if you're not exposing yourself, you're probably wasting your time. You're not completely with me if you're *not* letting some of yourself go. You can't be afraid of it, or it isn't art."

Whether it's the descending churn of "Lookin' for a Woman," the twin-fiddle basted Texas dance hall of "You Broke My Heart" or the jangle-pop country duet with Miranda Lambert "This Is How It Ends," the dashed hopes and jagged feelings drive many of the songs. There's also a healthy dose of ne'er-do-well brio in the sweeping "If Mama Coulda Seen Me," the lumbering churn of "Fixin' to Die" and the finger-picking showcase "News From Colorado," which offer festering moments of life rubbed raw.

"The job is empathy. It really is," Earle allows as the interview winds down. "There's that commitment to art...and it's why the best country songs are being written by women. Brandy Clark, Kacey Musgraves, Miranda Lambert. A lot of artists have their names on songs they didn't write; they sit in a room and take half the song."

Earle shifts his weight and leans forward. He's talked about New York City being good for him, knowing the homeless guy who lives in the next doorway, and his ability to pick up single tickets to ball games and Broadway shows. If he didn't think he'd end up on his own, then he's aware—as the song declares—"livin' on the road ain't all it's cracked up to be."

Strip away the romance, and there's not much left. Conceding, "I'm not lonely, 'til I am," Earle weighs the wages of being gone. "Commiting to art at the level I have costs something. Most people couldn't spend the amount of time on a bus that I do, or pay what I pay for it. I'm being punished again for the fact that I make my living being gone. It gets used against you in court. It gets used against you because girls want to make you feel guilty; it gets used against you because kids want to make you feel guilty. You feel guilty, and you *are* guilty."

Earle hesitates, then, draws the larger circle of life captured by art. If his son Justin Townes Earle has spent time decrying his father's absence, then the Americana artist is now having to grapple with the same choices his father faced.

"Justin's getting ready to be a dad, and we've been talking about this a lot," Earle says of his oldest son. "He's getting ready to find out. Maybe he'll make a different choice than I did. I was never running from anything; I'm pretty domesticated."

HIGH-SPEED INTROSPECTION

The War on Drugs may have crafted their biggest-sounding collection of headphone anthems yet, but Adam Granduciel is still searching for a deeper understanding of his everyday life.

BY MIKE GREENHAUS

ADAM GRANDUCIEL can pinpoint the exact moment Deadheads started showing up at his concerts. It was December 2011 and The War on Drugs, his indie-leaning psychedelic-rock band, had routed through the Midwest. Granduciel happened to be walking through a Kohl's in Lawrence, Kan., when he heard "Touch of Grey," the Grateful Dead's shiny late-'80s comeback anthem and lone Top-10 single, playing above the aisles. The track's chime-y guitar riff hit Granduciel in just the right way and reminded him of the high-speed headphone music his band specializes in.

"I'd never heard the song in that context," Granduciel says more than five years later on a gorgeous spring day. "I was like, 'This is a sweet tune—those chords are right up my alley.' So we learned it in the back of a van and I half-assed the lyrics one night in Indianapolis. It ended up on the internet and my friends from high school started texting me—'Dude, great 'Touch of Grey.'" The next night in Chicago, there were seven or eight full-on Deadheads there."

In certain respects, the unexpected viral buzz was the closest thing The War on Drugs have had to an "overnight hit" since the 38-year-old singer-guitarist started sharing his songs with a select group of his Philadelphia friends just over a decade ago. Granduciel—whose sound has long been described as Tom Petty fronting the Dead—laughs at the roundabout circumstances that finally turned a new subset of fans on to his main-stage-size recording project and, eventually, led to his inclusion on Aaron and Bryce Dessner's *Day of the Dead* compilation. But he does have a little bit of buyer's remorse: "I'm happy we ended up with 'Touch of Grey,' but I wish we could have changed our song to 'Black Peter' or 'Sugaree.'"

It's late May, and Granduciel is wandering around his adopted Brooklyn neighborhood as he gears up to drop The War on Drugs' fourth full-length album, *A Deeper Understanding*, in August via Atlantic. The LP is also The War on Drugs' major label debut. The tall, long-haired musician—who once described himself as a natural introvert who feels more comfortable in the studio than onstage—has been thinking a good deal about how his personal, introspective stories have gradually reached larger, and wider, audiences. As he prepares to enter his 40s and watches his friends start to plant roots, he's also particularly sensitive to his social circle's gradual changes. "It was like, 'I opened my eyes, and my life had changed.' A lot of that seeped into my songwriting," he admits.

Granduciel relocated back East a few months ago after spending a number of years in Los Angeles to be close with his girlfriend, actress Krysten Ritter, and also maintains a studio and rehearsal space in his old Philadelphia stomping grounds. ("No, the *first* borough," he quips in response to the popular "Sixth Borough" descriptor used to market the city's close proximity to New York.) The celebrity relationship unexpectedly landed Granduciel in the gossip columns a few times but—though a combination of skyrocketing real estate prices and a few brutal winters has helped shift the indie-rock world's epicenter from New York to LA—Brooklyn shouldn't worry about losing him anytime soon.

"Moving back couldn't have come soon enough for me—I'm an East Coast guy," he says with sense of tough, Northeast pride. "My whole family is in Massachusetts; my second family is in Philly. When I went on tour, I had all my stuff in storage and just started living with my girlfriend. LA does a lot of things really awesome, but I didn't take advantage of that stuff."

Like most bands of their ilk, The War on Drugs have logged in countless hours on the road, getting a bird's-eye view of various cities around the world, but never truly connecting with their surroundings. Granduciel estimates he's played LA 30 times in the past decade and, after living in the City of Angels for a few years, he enjoys being able to now know the distance between a club in Echo Park and, say, a favorite brunch spot. But his community ultimately drove him home. "I missed my friends and my neighborhood camaraderie—being my block captain. My band and I are so close, and I'll get texts all the time—they'd come out to work, but when they would leave or when I was by myself in the studio, I'd yearn for that feeling of 'Let's go meet up at the bar and talk about the demos.'"

A Deeper Understanding arrives three years after The War on Drugs' breakthrough *Lost in the Dream*. While it's common for The War on Drugs to have a lag between

Philly's finest: Dave Hartley, Charlie Hall, Robbie Bennett, Adam Granduciel , Jon Natchez, Anthony LaMarca (l-r)

releases due to their painstaking recording process and packed tour itinerary, the wait felt particularly long since *A Deeper Understanding* is their first release since seguing from club darlings with a dedicated fan base to harbingers of the "new psychedelia." Granduciel has historically been his own biggest critic, and now he also has to deal with the expectations of a built-in fan base.

"A lot of things were in the periphery after the last record," he admits. "The whole operation stayed really close, but it just becomes a bigger thing, and then you come to make a record and there are more people involved. I had to make sure that I was working in a manner that I felt comfortable working in—and that we were prepared to play the places we were playing."

* * *

THE WAR ON DRUGS TECHNICALLY formed in 2005, but the ensemble's early years often felt more like a blur of friendly collaborations and songwriting sessions than notches on a concrete timeline. After years of being primarily known for hip-hop and electronic music, Philadelphia started nurturing a tight-knit lo-fi scene around the start of the 21st century, particularly in the city's Fishhead neighborhood. Granduciel, who grew up in Dover, Mass., moved to Philly in 2003 and quickly fell into a circle of fellow obsessive artists like now-renowned guitarist Kurt Vile, who was an early ally and War on Drugs co-pilot, while working various odd jobs. He describes himself as the classic bedroom recording artist who was always writing songs but too shy to share those stories with the world.

"When Adam entered a talent contest with some guys in high school, he was too nervous to even face the crowd," says Dave Hartley, who has served as The War on Drugs' bassist since 2005 and also fronts his own project, Nightlands. "He had his back to the audience and his head down playing his guitar."

Yet since The War on Drugs' earliest days, Granduciel was able to harness that angst and use it to connect with his crowd. "Even when he was less of a 'frontman,' Adam was always a compelling performer," the bassist notes. "An audience senses fear, but it also senses authenticity. And he always had a really rare sincerity and authenticity, whether he was just singing and not talking, talking to the audience, or having a bad show and a subsequent meltdown. The crowd always rallied to his side; they just loved him instinctively."

Vile was the first member of the Fishtown collective to hit it big on a national level and left The War on Drugs after their 2008 debut, *Wagonwheel Blues*. (However, he did contribute to

that release's 2011 follow-up, *Slave Ambient*, and the two artists shared drummer Mike Zanghi for a while.) Some early articles that didn't quite get his scene incubator energy cited Granduciel—who also clocked in time in Vile's group—as something of a splinter act, but The War on Drugs started gaining traction as well. Their artsy, guitar-driven mixture of punk-angst and psychedelia was a natural extension of the art-winger DIY scene that had started to emerge a few hours away in Brooklyn and Queens as a reaction to an increasingly mainstream indie-rock movement.

Granduciel acknowledges his own connection to the jam world, which had a profound impact on a generation of future musicians in the late '90s. "It's a big part of growing up in the Northeast," he says pridefully, also citing his lifelong friend Jeff Aldridge, who he credits with turning him on to playing music in middle school and who, he points out, remained part of the Disco Biscuits' community that was developing nearby. "I wasn't super into 'the scene' in high school, mostly because I was pretty antisocial. I didn't really do anything; I didn't go to dances, but I *did* go see Phish at the Boston Garden on New Year's Eve going into 1997. It's one of those classic shows—I'd never been to a concert like that before and my mind was completely blown."

He had a parallel journey with the Dead's music too, finding inspiration in their various periods at different points in his own musical awakening. "I got into the '75-'80 era, when Jerry picked Wolf back up, though I never got too heavy into the Pigpen era. But when you get older you realize: Phil's out of his fucking mind." Long before that fateful big-box store trip, The War on Drugs also had a direct connection to the Dead's history when they used the tape machine from *Anthem of the Sun* on *Wagonwheel Blues*.

The War on Drugs' early releases possessed a murky charm, yet Granduciel always had an ear for great hooks and his Dylan-esque vocal delivery had a classic rock-and-roll reverence that set him apart from many of his peers. For his first few years with The War on Drugs, he played acoustic guitar through an amp or two. Hartley remembers a European tour when Granduciel plugged in and showed off his ability to shred. "One show specifically, in Brighton, U.K. in probably 2009 or so, I realized: 'Holy shit, he basically just solos the entire time now,'" Hartley explains. "Once that evolution happened, we were off to the races because, in my estimation, he's the greatest guitar player in the world. Not technically, but no one can match his expressiveness and use of tone—his playing is always so interesting, so emotional. It communicates so much."

"There are politics involved in having a fully committed touring band when you start making a record," Granduciel says of his group's involvment in their new LP.

The War on Drugs' big break came while on the road supporting *Lost in the Dream*. That album married Granduciel's lyrical discussions—which touched on his struggles with anxiety and depression—with the treadmill energy of '80s Bruce Springsteen. A critically acclaimed, blogger-favorite, the LP also nodded to Granduciel's varied interests in space-rock soundscapes, shoegazing fuzz and the guitar heroics of Neil Young's Crazy Horse period. It spawned five singles: "Red Eyes," "Under the Pressure," "Burning," "Eyes to the Wind" and "An Ocean in Between the Waves," which helped form the bedrock of the band's increasingly fierce live show. They also scored spots on the upper lines of festivals around the world, headlined Radio City Music Hall and landed on television programs ranging from *The Tonight Show* to *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*. While The War on Drugs' lineup shifted a bit during those blurry years on the road, they eventually settled on a steady live band consisting of Granduciel, Hartley, keyboardist Robbie Bennett, drummer Charlie Hall, and multi-instrumentalists Anthony LaMarca and Jon Natchez.

> "You never grow out of looking back, thinking of yourself in a specific time—that's something you keep learning as you get older."
>
> ADAM GRANDUCIEL

However, their crossover success wasn't all luck and word of mouth. Granduciel had actually started working on his singing, fine-tuning his voice into a communicative instrument that maintained his authentic rasp. As his melodies grew more complex, he discovered new, challenging registers that flipped '70s rock tropes on their heads.

Hartley first noticed that Granduciel's voice had sharpened into an instrument on par with his guitar prowess around the time The War on Drugs leader quit smoking. "He's never going to be the kind of frontman who runs around the stage and gets the audience to clap along or any of that crap," he says. "He doesn't come into the audience's world to communicate with them, he creates an intimate and compelling world of his own onstage and allows the audience to transport themselves into that world alongside him."

* * *

GRANDUCIEL BEGAN CRAFTING *A Deeper Understanding* while he was still promoting—or "dealing with," in his parlance—*Lost in the Dream*. In between tours, he'd carve out time to demo songs whenever he had a free moment; Granduciel rented a studio with a piano and Pro Tools for three months in Brooklyn and spent some time at home in Philly workshopping ideas. While in LA, he also brought his band into the studio for some loose sessions that produced "Knocked Down" and a few other ideas.

After The War on Drugs wrapped up their North American outing, Granduciel also started looking for a more formal LA clubhouse. He eventually settled on a space in Atwater Village and, by December 2015, the singer-guitarist was clocking in every day—writing, working on demos or finishing tracks he'd started on the road. The rest of The War on Drugs started flying in every five or six weeks for informal jams and writing sessions. Finally, they brought in engineer Shawn Everett to help them get over the finish line. The group was particularly drawn to his work on Alabama Shakes' wild second album, *Sound & Color* and Granduciel emailed Everett blindly through his "rinky, dinky Geocities website" to gage his interest in working with The War on Drugs.

They laid down the final tracks at various LA spaces before Granduciel, ever the auteur, took stock of what he'd collected over the previous year. He says that the process may sound anxiety-inducing—and

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Shawn Brackbill

Tom Hines

BEHIND SAD EYES

Grizzly Bear bounce back from a five-year studio pause with a fresh set of rules and a new perspective on Pharrell's most optimistic song.

BY LARSON SUTTON

CHRIS TAYLOR crosses the brick patio behind his rented Los Angeles bungalow. Raised beds of expectant vegetables border the fenced-in backyard; a motorcycle and a pair of sand-crusted boogie boards rest against the parched white clapboard of a windowless shed. The Grizzly Bear bassist opens the door, letting the midday sunlight leak into his Terrible Studios.

The rest of Grizzly Bear follow Taylor inside. Guitarist/singer Daniel Rossen chooses an armchair without any arms, cornered near another motorcycle. Drummer Christopher Bear, legs crisscrossed, sits on the rug. Its thick, fibrous woven cables, though, look more aesthetically pleasing than comfortable. Singer/guitarist Ed Droste—who originally founded Grizzly Bear as a solo project—is delayed on a coffee run and arrives last. He does a quick round of greetings, and takes an end of the couch.

Five years ago, Grizzly Bear were surging on an upward trajectory dotted with national TV appearances and concerts filled to capacity. They had released another acclaimed Top-10 album, *Shields*, which followed 2009's breakthrough, *Veckatimest*. Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood called the Brooklyn-bred outfit his favorite band.

Though Grizzly Bear had recently garnered buzz on the festival circuit and were already critical darlings, the indie-rock upstarts didn't expect to find themselves playing as world-tour headliners. While at this point, most bands would press down on the accelerator, Grizzly Bear put on the brakes.

"I feel like we'd been in this washing machine of touring and recording records," says Taylor, who also functions as the band's producer. "Everyone needed to come back to normal life."

There wasn't any formal declaration of a hiatus, much less a breakup, yet, there was also little enthusiasm to soldier on as they had been. The day following the final *Shields* performance at a sold-out Opera House in Sydney, Taylor had an idea to deter the band's tendency to go their separate ways.

"What if we reconvene in three months?" he proposed. "Everyone was like, 'Yeah...no.'"

"I was already on a plane," says Rossen. "I had skipped out."

Rossen booked a solo tour. Bear returned to Upstate New York. As the time apart stretched on, Droste wondered—not for the first time—if Grizzly Bear was done.

"Even when we went to Marfa [Texas, for the recording of *Shields*], I was thinking, 'I'm not sure this is happening,'" he says. "For the last six or seven years, it's been TBD until it happens."

"Because we are very democratic, finding that collective product that has a reason for being is harder," says Rossen. "We had no reason. We had no contract."

Taylor left Brooklyn for Berlin, then went to Washington State. He and his wife drove the length of the Pacific Coast—starting in Seattle and moving south—searching for the right fit. They ultimately settled on a hill overlooking downtown Los Angeles.

"I had gotten to a point where I was like, 'I'm not really having fun here anymore,'" Ed Droste says of his decision to leave New York. I thought, "'Do I want to grow old here?'"

With a shock of blonde hair and cheeks ripened red, Taylor could just as soon answer a casting call for a Malibu surfer. Of the four, the inactivity hit him hardest.

He leans forward in his chair, almost eager to tell the tale of that restless waiting time.

"Oh, my god, I definitely was really itchy," says Taylor. "I actually thought, 'Maybe I'm never going to be in a band again. What's my future? Should I consider other career options?'"

Taylor wrote, then edited and rewrote emails to his three bandmates. He was wary of appearing freakishly anxious or insistent.

"I don't know that any of us were fully not ready," says Bear. "The question of how we start making a record is always a little different."

For one thing, they now were split geographically. Droste, too, had traded the Big Apple for the City of Angels. Rossen was on his way out west. Bear remained back East.

On previous recording sessions, they would simply "pile into a place and start doing it," says Bear. "This time, if there weren't enough beginnings of ideas or material, we decided to wait and chip away at it in our own corners."

The interim period came with a few pleasant interruptions, too. Bear and Rossen were among a host of indie rockers invited to perform on *Day of the Dead*, a benefit compilation album of Grateful Dead covers assembled by The National twin guitarists Aaron and Bryce Dessner. Rossen, who has covered the Dead with his Department of Eagles project and joked for years about starting a Dead cover band with members of The National, suggested the plaintive *Workingman's Dead* ballad "High Time." The Dessners agreed to record that track, but also asked Bear and Rossen to help them with a far more expansive recording.

"They really wanted to tackle 'Terrapin Station,'" says Bear.

Initially, Bear wasn't sure they could recreate, with sincerity, the fanciful spirit of the expansive track. Far from tie-dyed Deadheads themselves, he and Rossen decided to approach the opportunity more as an empty canvas rather than a paint-by-numbers piece. After recording the song live in the studio, the pair took the rough version away for alterations.

"We focused on trying to reimagine the middle section," Bear says. "To find a way to make it a little darker and a little scarier."

The "Terrapin" session paralleled work on demos and skeletal tracks for Grizzly Bear. By 2015, new songs were emerging. Yet, no one was quite ready to say they were making an album.

"We didn't commit early on to calling it a record because we didn't want it to be forcing something," Rossen says. And, he admits, "We are slow. There's no doubt we are slower than most bands."

"We wanted to make sure we had enough songs we liked," adds Taylor.

Collectively, they began to chip away. They hunkered down at Taylor's newly renovated Southern California studio space and also laid down tracks at Vox in Hollywood and back in New York. They were accumulating material strong enough for a new release, but they were also still cautious.

"It wasn't like, 'What are we? Are we a band? Is this a record?' It was more like, 'Let's just figure out what's good for us,'" Taylor says. "We're reformatting our creative process as a band and it was really refreshing."

* * *

LAST YEAR, BEAR, A PROUD new father and the group's lone New York holdout, moved to Los Angeles. Grizzly Bear's manifest destiny was complete; though, ironically, Los Angeles-native Rossen landed in New Mexico. While they're reluctant to conflate

Tom Hines

the dividends of writing and recording their new repertoire and their westward migration, all agree that their time living in the Empire State had come to an end.

Many of their friends and musical neighbors had already moved away and, more and more, Rossen says, Brooklyn had become a place to spend money. While, they concede, the lure of the city still exists, it was no longer the inspiring fountainhead of their 20s.

"I was just exhausted by it," says Droste. "I had gotten to a point where I was like, 'I'm not really having fun here anymore.' I thought, 'Do I want to grow old here?'"

At a time when music is often treated more disposable as ever, five years can be a long time to be away. Yet, the band worried little about the group's contemporary currency. What really mattered to them, Rossen says, was "a step somewhere."

"I don't even know what the trend would be, even if I could call it that," says Taylor.

The bassist worked with a variety of bands during his group's pause and, after producing younger musicians so fixated on the sound of the moment, Taylor helped Grizzly Bear focus on developing their unique voice as a band. Their underlying goal was to reign in four distinct musical personalities and funnel that into one unified sound.

"It's the most interesting thing for us to do," says Bear. "It's multifaceted enough for that to be the idea to pursue."

They culled through what they had recorded. Parts from both demo and formal sessions at the various locations generated encouraging degrees of excitement and usefulness. At least a dozen songs were worthy of consideration.

After two years and a cross-continental relocation, the foursome had its fifth album, *Painted Ruins* but lacked a label to distribute it. The choice to shop for prospective suitors was deliberate.

"Not that we would let a label control us, but we wanted to make sure that whomever was going to take us on believed in what we had," explains Droste.

"I don't actually see how it would work if there were any more hands on deck, any outside opinions," says Bear with a laugh.

The band, while retaining all creative control, signed a record deal with major label RCA. In May, they unveiled a pair of singles from the set: "Three Rings" and "Mourning Sound."

The band's hallmarks are immediate and resonant throughout the album. Droste and Rossen's spectral, psych-angelic voices float over propulsive, often intricate percussion and probing basslines. Baroque counterpoint moves to a plethora of sonic embellishments—customary, inventive and somewhere in between.

That's especially true on "Mourning Song," where an aural border at once divides and joins a static programmed pattern and subjective human impulses.

"Coming from a jazz, improvisation background, I value very much the push and pull a live performance can bring to a record," says Bear. "But, I've always liked to incorporate altered sounds, as well."

They also did a fair amount of combining sounds. Experimenting with older synths conjured fresh, distinct textures. The range occupied by a traditional instrument like a trombone was filled with tones created instead by electronics. And, whether it was Taylor on saxophone or with synths as stand-ins, "it was always a performance," says Bear.

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SAINTS OF CIRCUMSTANCE

Joe Russo's Almost Dead have embraced the Grateful Dead ethos and taken their music to new expanses, thanks to serendipity and reckless abandon

By **PETER SHAPIRO** *with* **DEAN BUDNICK**

Ed. Note: Peter Shapiro first met Joe Russo in the late-'90s when the drummer performed at the nightclub Shapiro had recently purchased, Tribeca's now-fabled Wetlands Preserve. At the time, Russo was in the jazz-fusion collective Fat Mama. They've remained close, and Russo has performed with a variety of projects at Shapiro's venues and events during the past two decades. In the following conversation, which took place at Russo's Brooklyn home, Relix*'s publisher speaks with the drummer about a wide range of topics, with a particular focus on the origins and development of Joe Russo's Almost Dead. JRAD, as Russo's fans call the project, actually played their first gig at Shapiro's Brooklyn Bowl and have returned nearly every season during the past few years. Russo affirms, "That room birthed the band."*

JOE RUSSO'S Almost Dead debuted on Jan. 26, 2013. Russo drew together four of his longtime friends and bandmates—guitarists Tom Hamilton and Scott Metzger, keyboardist Marco Benevento and bassist Dave Dreiwitz—from various projects on something of a whim for an evening of Dead covers. At the time, Russo had been performing alongside Phil Lesh and Bob Weir as part of Furthur since 2009.

As Russo remembers, JRAD's debut was fortuitous: "There's an amazing group of music fans known as the NYC Freaks who, for as long as I've been a working guy in New York City, have been supportive of musicians. They have this party every year called the Freaks Ball, and we always try to do something for it. That year [2013], it was going to be a two-nighter. The first night was going to be Bustle in Your Hedgerow, our goofy instrumental Zeppelin band that I've been doing with Marco and Scott and Dreiwitz."

For the second night of the Freaks Ball, Russo was supposed to play with The Dean Ween Group, alongside Metzger, Dreiwitz and Mickey Melchiondo. But, shortly before the show, Melchiondo pulled the plug on that and put Russo in, what he calls, "scramble mode."

"[Peter] Costello, who was working at the Bowl at the time and was deeply ingrained in the Freaks List, called and was like, 'Would you ever do a Dead thing?' I said, 'Absolutely not. I'm in Furthur—I think that's weird.' I also didn't know if that would be cool, if I would get in trouble at work. We threw around a couple more ideas and nothing was really sticking and then, he said, 'What if you guys did "Bustle Plays The Dead?"' because we had done a thing called 'Bustle Plays Other Shit' one time and we did all of Black Sabbath's *Paranoid* and an Allman Brothers' tune and all this other stuff. It was really fun. He was like, 'Why don't you do something like that?' I was like, 'I don't know, is that the Dead? The words are so important to this thing.' With Led Zeppelin, a lot of it's about Gollum, so we could just get away with playing the sweet melodies.

"Then he said, 'We could get Tommy. I know Tommy loves the Dead.' I was like, 'Let's do it.' He asked me what I wanted to call it and I always thought it would be funny to call a band Almost Dead. It's stupid, it's a joke because it's not going to sound like the Dead. He wanted to put my name on it so maybe we'd get a couple people who maybe knew me. Maybe. I was the drummer in that band, where I had a role to play but I wasn't a household name. When we realized that [the acronym] was JRAD, I thought that was kind of cool.

I called the guys and everybody was into it. So we rehearsed twice and it was super loose and pretty wastey and we decided we were going to do it. I thought, 'It's for a party—nobody is going to know about it.' One of my big fears was somebody from Furthur telling me that it wasn't cool—I didn't want to ruffle those feathers, but Costello convinced me nobody was going to give a shit, in the best way possible."

Since that low-key party, JRAD has grown into one of Russo's primary focuses. They've expanded their repertoire to include a range of covers—from musicals to indie-rock—and even debuted an original song at their 100th show, "Keeping It Simple," which Russo had intended for Furthur. And after years on the club circuit playing original material, the drummer has learned that sometimes he's stumbled into his most successful projects.

"Marco and I were going to play some Zeppelin tunes for [former Wetlands talent buyer and Rocks Off founder] Jake

Dino Perrucci

Szufnarowski's 30th birthday on the boat [Rocks Off Concert Cruise] and we said, 'Hey, let's have Boom Boom Metzger come play with us,'" he recalls of Bustle's unexpected birth.

"Then Scott introduced us to Dave from Ween. And Dave's like, 'I hear you're in that Zeppelin thing—that's the coolest.' So we brought him in. All of these things were certainly not preconceived."

Was there a live show that you attended when you were younger where it all came together for you? For me, it was Madonna with the Beastie Boys at Madison Square Garden.

Strangely, I have more of a "where it all begins" with this Dead-world thing that always jumps out—the first gig at the Fox Theater [in Oakland, Calif.] with Furthur [on 9/18/09]. I had no idea what the hell was going on and I was totally freaking out because I didn't know any of the music. There's the line "once in a while, you get shown the light in the strangest of places if you look at it right," [from "Scarlet Begonias"] and the lights went on across the whole place. I kept thinking, "What the hell is going on? Where am I? Why am I on stage with these guys playing this music? This is the last thing in the world I ever expected." That line just punched me in the face so hard. The hairs on my arm are sticking up right now because it was such a huge moment.

How afraid were you to go into this complicated world of the Dead? I still get a small knot in my stomach when I'm walking to the Bowl. Although, once I'm there, I feel more relaxed. What was it like on your opening night?

I was petrified. I think I went to pee maybe 15 times before we got onstage. The thought in my mind that kept haunting me was, "Every single person in this room knows this music better than I do, and I am totally faking it right now." There was just so much information running through my head—I had no idea what was what.

Thank god, Jay [Lane] was there [on percussion] because I could look to him and be like, "Is this what we're doing now?" He was an amazing help and shepherd through that time because I was just neck-deep in this stuff. I had no idea what was happening. I had all of these notes everywhere and was jumping into this catalog that was so beloved by so many people. I felt like a complete outsider that night.

I walked off after that first set, and I was really low on myself. I was like, "I'm sucking. I'm not really feeling confident." I go to Bob, who I really didn't know very well at the time, and I was like, "I'm sorry. I'm feeling really tense out there. Any tips?" Then he pauses and says, "Eat some mushrooms?"

That's when the pressure just fell out of my body. I was like, "Everything's fine. My boss just told me to eat some mushrooms, so I guess everything's going to be cool. This is a different thing."

From that moment forward, I was slowly trying to make as much sense out of this world as I could, as an outsider, essentially. And discovering this songbook became this amazing journey that I absolutely love—that I couldn't live without at this point. All of this is hilarious because, if somebody told me this when I was 18, I would have thought it was insane. I did not listen to the Grateful Dead.

How were you first approached about the Furthur gig?

I got this random call from Matt Busch, Bob Weir's manager, in the summer of 2009, with the offer to come play a couple of shows with Bob and Phil. I had no

connection to the Dead world. I thought it was supposed to be some kind of benefit show. That eventually turned into what became this audition process for Furthur. At one point, they sent me like 10 songs and I was like, "Oh, my God, I have learned 10 songs—that's crazy." [*Laughs*.]

Then, as time went on, more songs kept coming to me. When there were maybe 60 songs, I was like, "What the hell is going on?" My now-wife said, "I think it's an audition." And I'm like, "For what?" I had no idea what they had in mind.

So I was studying my ass off as much as you can for that amount of stuff in that time frame. Then, we were told that this is going to be a band, and we're going to do X amount of shows a year, and the first shows are going to be in September. So over the next couple of weeks, we did these 10 rehearsal shows at the Throckmorton Theatre—a really small place. Then, every morning, I woke up with 10 more songs in my inbox to be played that night. This happened for 10 days straight so, by the end of this, I had 160 songs in my brain.

Did you know Phil from the 2006 summer tour? [Russo toured in a project with Trey Anastasio, Mike Gordon and Marco Benevento—which came to be known as G.R.A.B.—while they shared a bill with Phil & Friends.]

The first time I played with Phil was at the Jammy Awards, where we did the Duo with Gordon, Les [Claypool] and Phil. And then the next time I played with Phil—until I was in a band with Phil—was at Bonnaroo, where we did G.R.A.B. for the first time during a late-night, secret SuperJam. Phil came out and we played "Casey Jones" and "Goin' Down the Road Feeling Bad." Again, truth be told, I kind of knew those songs, but I remember I was like, "How does this end?" I had no idea. When we did that tour, we would say hello throughout the thing, but Phil and I never sat down or hung or played or anything. So three years later, out of the blue, I got this call from Matt Busch, but it was due to Phil saying, "I want to try Joey out."

At first, you had Jay as a wingman, which is key, but he went back to Primus [in March 2010]. What do you remember about your first gig without him?

I've always played on my own. I haven't been in a lot of double-drummer situations, and I love having the freedom of being able to act on an impulse at any moment, musically. It was very freeing to get that moment back. I felt like, "I can be me now." So over the next few months, I started taking a couple of liberties and seeing what yielded positive or negative looks from Bob or Phil. I started finding my own place within the music and becoming more comfortable with the music as well.

The first show was at the Furthur Festival in California [on May 28, 2010]. We ended up doing a bunch of albums. That was the first time we did the whole "Terrapin Station" suite. It felt a little bit like my coming-out party.

Did you ever directly express to Bob or Phil, "Hey, I'm thinking about doing this..." Or was it just something that happened on-the-fly?

When it comes to music, I prepare a lot in every sense, but onstage, it's absolutely in the moment. So there were definitely times where I would follow my instincts and I was not necessarily met with a positive facial reaction from one or both of my bandmates. But that's the beauty of trying stuff—sometimes, you don't stick the landing. I feel like that's the cornerstone of this band [JRAD], especially. I learned so much in those years with Furthur about that because I was also playing with people I didn't know.

I had the luxury of growing up and playing at Wetlands and the Knitting Factory and improvising in a way that had nothing to do with this holy grail of music. It had nothing to do with these musicians that I most likely would never have played with, if not for being in Furthur. So it was interesting to try to adapt to a style of improvisation that wasn't super familiar to me. I was more accustomed to the Knitting Factory style of "Let's go crazy at any time," John Zorn freak-outs.

With Furthur, at first, we were mostly improvising within a blues or country aesthetic, but then I did start seeing things where I was like, "These guys are crazy like this too." There was a level of complete chaos within it. That started to become more apparent and more exciting.

Let's talk about communication and the language of leading a band, especially as it relates to this music. The tempo is really important. Jerry used to be the leader that Bobby and Phil would look to, even though he didn't want to lead. They followed him for the tempo, but then after he was gone, it wasn't always so easy.

There were many times where, at the same moment, Bob would be telling me to slow down and Phil would be telling me to speed up. It was a little stressful. There was a learning curve, and it was learning how to interact with these

DAVE DREIWITZ: Dave is just an amazing human and, anytime you're around him, you're just so happy he's there. I've been lucky to play with Dave now for going on 15-20 years. We were both in Chris Harford's Band of Changes.

Dave is just such a rock-solid badass. The thing he brings to our band that I think is very different than the way a lot of people play is: He does not play like Phil Lesh. That's not his bag. Dave's somewhere between Lemmy and Carol Kaye. He creates a beautiful R&B pocket and his tone is just amazingly warm before it's destructive.

Maybe more than anyone in this collective, he helps us sound different. He approaches this music in a completely different way than other bass players would approach it because usually there's such a desire to sound like Phil or even to take that approach. That's not where Dave's from, so we can get into these heavy, grooved-based things that a lot of people playing this music do not get into. Somebody said Phil Lesh "never plays the same thing once." That's fucking brilliant, and he hasn't.

So, when we started playing this music for the first time—and again just approaching it without any pre-conceived notions—playing with Dave was pretty powerful because he was playing Grateful Dead like an R&B bass player. So we can explore the beauty of monotony, something that was slightly elusive in other versions, where we can say, "We're here now, and we're just going to be here now for a minute."

Dave allows me to go fucking crazy because, in a lot of places, there should be a tether point. I'm down to go completely free but, at a certain point, the craziness is only appreciated and received in a way when you have that control group—that thing to base the elasticity off of or the harmonic dissention off of. If Dave's sitting there holding down this thing, then I can just go crazy. It frees me up to be melodic, to play with time, to play with dynamics because he's my drummer, in a sense. It's really cool that, over the course of our time together, we've established this thing of who's the timekeeper, who's the embellisher or who's the soloist. He really brings that specific thing to this band that has not been done a lot before.

Dino Perrucci

two amazing, larger-than-life people. I didn't want to let down either of these guys, but they were asking me for different things at the same time.

So what did you do?
I would play at the same tempo, but I would make an "I'm psyched face" at Phil, and a sleepy face at Bob, so I acknowledged what they both wanted. I had to have this discussion with both of them, and they were both so cool. They both knew I was in a bit of a hard scenario, but it helped for me to acknowledge, "I hear both of you guys," and then decide when to really go full bore in one direction or another. There were times when Bob was singing a song and he wanted to play it slow, so I was going to play it slow. Then if we were in some crazy jam and Phil wanted me to go fucking nuts, I'd go fucking nuts. It's just like getting to know anybody. You learn when and where to really put your efforts into making someone happier.

Now that it's your band, you're kind of like Bobby and Phil. You're driving what you want it to be tempo-wise, speed-wise, all of those things. I've watched a bunch of the shows next to you and seen the nonverbal communication that's going on. There's a lot of communication in the eyes.
There's tons. When we did that party at Brooklyn Bowl—for what I thought was this one-time thing—I just wanted to play these songs how I'd always wanted to play them in Furthur and not worry about someone telling me maybe, yes or no. The thing about playing with guys that you've been playing with forever is that it becomes really easy. The stuff that we can do with this unspoken language onstage is much like the Dead playing together for a long time. I'm finally back playing with these guys I grew up playing with, so I can shoot Marco a smile and he knows what we're about to do, or he could do something. Tommy, honestly, reads my mind better than anybody onstage. I'll just look at him and it's amazing the stuff that can happen in that realm. I would say 98 percent of it is just because we've all played together for so long. These are my buddies. These are the guys I spent time with in the van and in the Subaru station wagon, for years.

When it comes to questions of tempo, does everyone sort of defer to you because it's your band?
My name's on this thing just because we had to put the name on the thing the first day, but we're really a band of bandleaders. It's weird because we all have such a deep history. I've been in Tommy's band [American Babies], where he's the bandleader. I've played with Wolf!, where Scott's the "bandleader." Marco and I had our thing. I've played in Dave's Crescent Moon. Each of us has fulfilled a bandleader role with other members in the band. This one just happened to come out of Furthur in a sense, where I was already doing this stuff. I put it together and had maybe a slight head start on the knowledge of this world at that time. At this point, we're a band. I do handle the mechanics of everything, but when we're playing onstage, once it goes, it goes. Everybody throws it around and we follow each other. But I'll make my ideas known. I feel like there should be someone to do that in some sense, even if it's a small, helpful direction because sometimes people are just too respectful of each other.

Oteil Burbridge has performed with you [subbing for Dreiwitz, who was on tour with Ween], and he was coming out of the Dead & Company world where they play the catalog a certain way. What did you say to him about approaching the music?
Our band is a very specific thing and, due to scheduling or whatever, we've now had to use some subs sometimes, which was something we weren't sure was going to work out. But something that I've always liked about our band is that it has this Jersey punk-rock attitude. Dave plays a sweet, old, vintage, four-string bass, so I asked Oteil to play an old bass. He's the most incredible, virtuosic animal on the planet. But I had seen him play with Derek and Susan and he was playing this old Fender bass, and I lost my fucking mind. I was blown away because he's like a fucking magician, who took this instrument and transcended into his own world. So when we had gotten back together out of nowhere and it turned out Dave had stuff on the books, I decided to ask Oteil, who I had just met when he had started playing with Dead & Company. Looking back, maybe I shouldn't have asked him to play a four-string, but he was really, really cool about it.

How much will you rehearse songs before a show? For instance at the Capitol Theatre "Cumberland Blues" turned into a blues thing [on 7/22/17]. Is that something you worked out at soundcheck?
No, it's all organic. It's just part of a quest of trying to do it differently. Sometimes you just end up in something that feels a certain way and that opens a door toward something. At the Cap, we went into a full shuffle because that's the way we would play any song where we had the full ability to go wherever we wanted. The songs just

TOM HAMILTON: Tommy and I met in the late-'90s through a random gig at Wetlands with Marc Brownstein. Marc had quit the Disco Biscuits and had put this band Electron together to play some shows. Tommy and I did these shows and I don't think we saw each other for a couple of years. Then, he was working on these new songs and he had this concept, American Babies, which was a Ryan Adamsy, Bruce Springsteeny thing. He was doing all this electronic stuff and he really wanted to explore that side of his songwriting, so he put that band together as a recording project. He had some great songs and we did a couple of records. We went on to be close friends and he lived with me for a number of years. He was the first person who taught me how to sing harmonies, which has been incredible.

He's our resident Deadhead. It's fun to get input from Tommy on ideas. Even if we don't do something like the Dead did it, it's still nice when he tells me to check out a version of a song—it's just a cool vibe. He has that knowledge to share. It's also obviously important to have someone in this band have a greater understanding of what has been done.

While I have the connection with everyone onstage, I know I can look to Tom and he knows where we are and where I'm envisioning it's going. We share that visual aesthetic on a destination, or a course toward a destination. Tommy is also able to tap into the passion quickly, which is something that he and I share. He can push the boundaries that extra bit that a lot of people either don't want to, aren't willing to or aren't able to, and I respect all three concepts. I know we can be heavy-handed at times, but he often feels like my partner in that concept of "we don't care." We don't care if it's going to be heavy-handed. We're feeling this right now, and we're doing it for us as much as we are for anybody out front. I respect and am so thankful for that connection of partnership in those moments of the unspoken.

Tommy and Scott are both phenomenal lead guitarists and rhythm guitarists. That's not common with this songbook, yet Tommy and Scott are fairly different players, so it sparks things across the stage.

Dino Perrucci

happened to be Grateful Dead songs.

There will be some stuff that we would work out in soundcheck, like when we first played "Help"> "Slip"> "Throwing Stones." You want to practice that. But I'd say most things that have that feeling are in the moment, just reacting and listening. That's the thing about this band—it's comprised of really great listeners. You don't have to be great players, but you have to be great listeners. We're all always listening. That's why we laugh so much at each other because people will sneak in little things, almost like inside jokes, musically. Tommy will be playing something and he'll play a little line from the end of "Rubin and Cherise," and we all hit the hits. We're not playing "Rubin and Cherise," but if you're all listening, you're available to hear every bit of information. It's a game. You're waiting there to hit the ball back, or to take the assist. That's another thing that we do well as a band—we set the other guy up for the kill shot. It really just comes down to listening and being open to going truly anywhere.

I've been in improvising situations where the intent is to go anywhere, but maybe if it goes somewhere, you might get a little tug on the neck to come back. [For us], nobody is worried about where it ends up, as long as it ends up somewhere cool. If you have complete reckless abandon, then there is a purity, and that's something I like about us. There is an honesty to what we do when we do it, that might not be for everybody. I know some people hate the way we play. And I get it. It can be really jagged or loud or fast. It can also be very pretty and very quiet. The beauty of it is that we're happy in all those places, but we're also relaxed and confident in going to any of those places, and I think that connects to the audience, where it's a true feeling of "We're all in this together and we're just all cool to see where this goes." That gives us a little something in our corner of feeling comfortable with each other and feeling confident and fearless, because regardless of what happens, nobody dies. Even if it goes really bad, it's still not the worst thing that's ever happened. I think we developed that confidence early playing together.

We don't rehearse the songs. We will learn the songs if we're going to do something new. But once we've learned a song, we won't go back and practice it. We'll work on vocals and harmonies, but most of the songs that are playable now for us, we don't need to run. We know the bones of them, and we don't even want to know them that well because, honestly, there have been mistakes onstage that have led to the coolest shit.

If Dave missed going to the bridge, and we had to go somewhere else, now we're somewhere else and we need to figure out how to get to the next thing. Our main thing is the spots in between the songs. The songs are so amazing, and we try to do them as much justice as we can, but I still don't think our strong suit is playing Grateful Dead songs. Our strong suit is playing as a five person collective and trying to get from A to B, in a different way than we have before—all while having that mindset of hoping that it's going to be something different. It does drive me a little bonkers if I start hearing us go to a place where we've been. It's going to happen. You're going to revisit themes. You're going to revisit feelings. But I'm not so psyched if we're playing a song and just because something cool happened another time we played it, there's a contrived idea to do it again. If somebody starts doing it again, I definitely will be like, "What the hell are you doing? No, we already did that. What do you want to talk about now?"

The way you set up onstage—five guys next to one another, really close together—gives the audience a sense of what you have in mind.

The idea is that we're all on the front line. That's how I want to present it. I want to present it as five people onstage, whereas maybe, traditionally, the drums aren't that far up, but it's not because I'm the leader as much as it's like, "Here are these five guys making music." I want to hear onstage like I hear in rehearsals. In rehearsal, you don't have all this other shit. You have amps and you have dudes playing instruments. That's our goal onstage. We're there to play music. We're not there to be on risers. I'm there to connect with my bandmates and my bandmates are there to connect with each other. That's why we don't have crazy lights. They can look amazing but what I want to show is, "Here are five guys making music and if that doesn't hold your attention then that's cool, but this is what we're going to do." We're not trying to do anything other than play music. That's the biggest goal for us.

How do you create the setlists?

A lot of the time, it's picturing what endings could get cool beginnings, or trying to do stuff

SCOTT METZGER: I've known Scott since back in the Wetlands days in the '90s. We've played tons of random gigs together. Scott was always a really great guitarist and then he became an incredible guitarist. Back in the RANA days, he was a little more of a sloppy, Jimmy Page-ish character. He had a Les Paul hung low and was playing rock songs about drinking. He's been sober now for over 11 years and, when he made that decision, he put such energy into his instrument. It's just unreal. If I stop to think how absolutely incredible he's become with his focus and dedication to that, it's overwhelming. It actually gets me emotional.

He became a student of music again, and of the guitar. He's at this point where if he makes a decision to do something, he can achieve it, musically or otherwise. I think it has transformed his being in the most incredible way. He works harder than anybody I know.

If I ask Scott to come in on anything, I know that he is going to come in and kill it. He is going to know more than anyone about what's going on—more than I know about what's going on. He takes a lot of pride in that and it's something I respect. He continues to put me in a state of awe.

Scott is so tasteful and toneful and occupies a space, like what I was talking about with Dave, where there's a tether point—a strong bit of information that comes from him all the time. It's a deep, tasteful tone that he lives in. It is fun—my favorite thing, though, is when I see Scott and the adrenaline takes over and he fucking goes nuts.

Whereas, Tommy maybe exists in the excited state a little bit more and Scotty lives in the reserved state, they can switch and both occupy those spaces. It's been cool over the course of these years to see what things are rubbing off on each of them. Scott will be like, "I'm going for the jugular right now," and he does and nails it. That's not maybe his natural go-to space. And then, maybe in reverse, Tommy will do a little more of a composed minimalist thing before taking it to the stratosphere. The way those guys work off each other is an absolute necessity to this band.

When we first did it, we had Tommy sing most of the Jerry stuff because he was a Dead fan and knew it, and I sang a couple things because we were not trying to do the Bob and Jerry thing. But then, Scott opened his mouth doing the first Bobby thing and we all turned our heads.

Dino Perrucci

that hasn't been done before. It sucks because now it's getting harder picking different parts of the song that wouldn't traditionally be explored in an effort to get to the next thing. My goal is: If we're going to do something that's been done a million times, let's find a way to do something different with it.

I think we've only done "Help"> "Slip"> "Franklin's Tower" a couple of times because I don't want people to know where it's going to go. There's something so exciting about not keeping it traditional because what those guys did was so amazing. That may be part of why people are enjoying our treatment of this—"Hey, I've heard 'Help'> 'Slip' a billion times, and every time I've heard it, they're going to play 'Franklin's Tower.'" But if we go "Help"> "Slip"> "Althea," then that's going to surprise somebody. And that's fun. It's fun for us and it's fun to watch the crowd.

It's easy to come up with ideas because people have done it the same way for so long with this exact songbook. It's like, "Why hasn't anybody done this? Everybody's allowed to do this." We're not doing anything *that* crazy. We're just doing it a little bit different. We're taking liberties in an effort to try to make it new, but I'm not trying to paint a picture like we're redefining this thing.

The only reason I'm going to go out and play this music is if it's interesting to me. I want it to interest me, I want it to interest my friends. My musician buddies who gave me shit for playing Grateful Dead music—I want them to come to the show and be like, "Holy, fuck." And that's happened quite a bit. It makes me really proud when somebody says, "You guys are really playing some stuff that's out there, and listening and truly improvising." It's a source of pride for me to take what's seen in different circles as maybe a less-than-super-cool thing, and hear those people be like, "I really like it." That makes me feel happy—I feel like we're treating it the way that we want to.

Dino Perrucci

Joe Russo

MARCO BENEVENTO: Marco brings a great sense of levity to the band, while still just being an absolute monster player. He's always there, he's always present, he's always joyfully ready to Marco-out. It's inspiring. I love sitting back and just watching him go. It feels like I'm back in the Duo, where we would have these moments where I would sit across from him and just watch and hear where he was going with stuff, while smiling the whole time. I've never stopped more while playing onstage than with Marco because I'm just like, "Oh, let's see what Marco does right now." He matches brilliance with his instrument and absolute joy and playfulness. He's Marco; he's Marco Benevento. It screams from him.

There were times in the Duo, and sometimes in this band still, when I realize I'm being too yin and he gets me to be a little more yang. He and I complement each other in a very special way, and always have. Over the last decade or two, I've really come to appreciate how he does his thing. It's inspiring and it informs my choices, musically and otherwise. He's always there to lighten it up. There's a lot of laughing while we're playing because we're kind of just cracking each other up. Sometimes we're just like, "What the hell is going on? What are we doing?" Or sometimes we are speaking to each other and saying some funny shit, with words. There is nothing better than feeling that happy while playing music. We have this combination of playing music, seeing other people out front having the best time, and being with our pals and having this casual rapport. Until now, I hadn't quite been able to do that outside of the Duo—that thing of not taking it so seriously that it tightens the clamp on the creativity.

For myself, there's definitely been moments where I've been super tense onstage. Now, when we go onstage, it's just goofy as hell—we're appreciative of the moment, and of each other. Just letting it go where it wants to go.

On Marco's birthday, you performed a Duo song ["Play Pause Stop"]. How did that come about?

We'd never officially done a song by any of our bands—although, we've done so accidentally—except for "So Long Jerry," a Ween song that we did once and Dave sang. Does somebody want to come to a JRAD show and hear a Duo song? Probably not, but it was his birthday so I thought it would be cool to celebrate a little extra with that. I always liked the idea of taking something written for two people and playing it with five people. Again, if we're going to interpret somebody else's songs, let's reinterpret our own songs too.

To be honest, I'm still trying to figure out what this is. It's taken on a life of its own, but I definitely try to throw in some random stuff here and there. We did some Stephen Malkmus; we did a Father John Misty tune. The covers that we bring in, I'd like to think represent a shared aesthetic, but not anything that the Dead has ever played, which is fun to do. If we're going to do a Dylan tune, let's do one that they didn't do, as well as the ones they did do.

My wife played me that Father John Misty tune, "I'm Writing a Novel." It's such a great song and I was getting really into it. Then, one day, I was writing a setlist at the piano, which is what I'll do because I'm like, "What key is this? Would it be cool to go into this here?" Then I was playing "I'm Writing a Novel" and thought, "This could be a cool 'Goin' Down the Road Feeling Bad' thing—let's do it." That's been exciting. It's been fun to see people's mixed reactions to that too. We did "Cinnamon and Lesbians" by Stephen Malkmus one of the nights Oteil joined us. My wife hips me to all this stuff. She was like, "Have you heard this Malkmus tune? It sounds like a Dead tune; it sounds like 'St. Stephen.'" So I'd always thought, "One day

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REVIEWS

Compiled by MIKE GREENHAUS

Arcade Fire

ARCADE FIRE

Everything Now COLUMBIA

Expectations are high for **Arcade Fire**'s fifth LP—but then again, that's sort of their "thing." The Canadian art-rock collective thrives on grandeur, from the three-or-four-year gaps between albums to the dazzling strings and horns, the maniacal onstage bashing of floor toms, the travels throughout Haiti and Jamaica, and the David Bowie collaborations. Even their failures are epic, as evidenced by the overlong dance-rock excursions of 2013's *Reflektor*. "Everything Now," the opener and title-track of their latest would-be opus, promises yet another cinematic event. Unfolding over five minutes (not including its intro and outro segue), the song conjures a globe-trotting indie-rock ABBA—in a good way. As **Win Butler** laments the cheap thrills of consumerism and iPhone culture, the band piles sonic twists into a pretzel-like arrangement: chiming piano, cascading strings, the exotic puff of a pygmy flute. But after that sweeping opener, *Everything Now* fails to clear—or even graze—the impressive high bar they set with their holy grail trio of *Funeral*, *Neon Bible* and *The Suburbs*. In fact, it often sounds tentative and pedestrian, probably the last two adjectives you'd expect to unholster while describing their music. "Creature Comfort" stumbles into plodding synth-rock, and "Chemistry" mars its nimble Afro-funk groove with lyrics that border on pop parody ("Dance with your boyfriend all night long/ Tell him you really, really love this song"). There are stabs at dub-reggae ("Peter Pan"), electro-pop balladry ("We Don't Deserve Love") and ragged punk ("Infinite Content"), but their vision comes off as confused and purposefully random. (The latter track, for example, abruptly shifts into country-rock twang for its coda.) If Arcade Fire's previous albums offered the immersion of an IMAX film, then *Everything Now* mostly feels like big-budget channel-flipping. ***Ryan Reed***

Chris Robinson Brotherhood

Barefoot in the Head SILVER ARROW

Barefoot in the Head, **Chris Robinson Brotherhood**'s first album recorded with bassist **Jeff Hill**, marks a further evolution in the CRB's soundscape. At its core, this is an acoustic record. **Adam MacDougall**'s weirdo synth tones play counterpoint to his piano and to **Barry Sless**' pedal steel. It feels like a series of tone poems as the guitars never stick with one sound for long; instead, all the instruments trickle through, shifting tones, with the guitar or synth laying out very simple melodic hooks. The guitars strum acoustic, then **Neal Casal** throws down a quick electric guitar riff in a rock breakdown. There's a progression across the album toward acoustic instruments, and toward bigger, deeper open spaces that create the psychedelic architecture. You can taste the ocean off Stinson Beach and feel the heat coming off the hills as winter subsides. Robinson's nature-based cosmic metaphors serve as a cycle of love songs, rather than as wizened meditations on how one must proceed in life or reflections on playing in a rock-and-roll band. Where "Behold the Seer" and "Hark, The Herald Hermit Speaks" feel a bit unsettlingly up-tempo, "Dog Eat Sun" is slow and ruminating, building in intensity as the acoustic guitars pick together through the verses: "Ah, universal one/ bright light, new sun/ the change has now begun/ no love forever." "Blue Star Woman" opens with jazz piano and drums, then becomes a low-slung summer porch groove, rattling bones while the guitars lean way far back in the reverb. It melts down into the psychedelic, but not for long. These are tightly structured songs, arranged by the shifting tones that rain through them like neutrinos. "High Is Not the Top" is Marin County bluegrass, while "Glow" features Hill playing huge upright bass notes below some classic Robinson country folk, with mandolin on top and **Alam Khan**'s sarod in the right channel. Robinson's vocals have an enormous amount of open space to cut across; you can hear every nuance in his breath. A flute joins in, and everyone sings together: "I feel you glow." It's a gorgeous song. Only in Marin could you make a song like this. Only in Marin could you make a record like this. ***Richard B. Simon***

Grizzly Bear

Painted Ruins RCA

Grizzly Bear's music has always existed in its own sphere, with art-rock textures and imagistic lyrics that feel more intellectual than their indie peers. (It's worth remembering that drummer **Chris Bear** and guitarist **Daniel Rossen** first met at jazz camp.) And when the quartet marries their love of widescreen ambience with their love of melody, the quality of their songwriting is also peerless. "Two Weeks" and "Cheerleader," both of which appear at their 2009 breakthrough *Veckatimest*, are two of indie music's modern standards—like "Over the Rainbow" for dudes in beanies. That said, *Painted Ruins*, their fifth album, and first in five years, approaches that lofty benchmark on several occasions. "Three Rings" showcases their intricate vocal blend. Led by the resonant coo of **Ed Droste** over a ringing guitar arpeggio and clanging electronic percussion, it is one of their most visceral moments to date. Droste commandeers the similarly forceful "Mourning Sound," anchored by **Chris Taylor**'s post-punk bass bark and Rossen's psychedelic guitar pings. These highlights occupy *Painted Ruins*' blissful first half, after which the band dials down the energy to the detriment of the album's flow—a couple of the Rossen-led pieces, including "Glass Hillside," drift by in a richly arranged haze. If you have to indulge their ambient tangents to earn their ear candy, then it's a deal worth making. "Like a rogue wave you wash right over me/ losing all sense of what my body could feel/ I was able to drift away from here," Droste offers on "Losing All Sense." Even in their most dynamic moments, Grizzly Bear still offers a similar escapism. ***Ryan Reed***

Blind Boys of Alabama

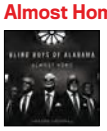
The National

Sleep Well Beast 4AD

"The day I die, the day I die/ Where will we be?" So croons **Matt Berninger**, in that trademark grumble, in "Day I Die" on **The National**'s seventh LP. Few rock bands could convert a lyric that bleak into a cathartic fist-pump, but that's the band's true expertise, and *Sleep Well Beast* delivers the indie-rock quintet's usual quota. But as "quota" suggests, there's also a workmanlike quality to their approach, and several tracks here feel like business as usual—emotionally affecting work, sure, but with the unshakable feeling that we've already been down this exact road numerous times. In particular, the LP is hampered by a run of morose ballads, like break-up reverie "Born to Beg," that mask paper-thin melodies with luxurious production values. The album functions better in small chunks or with the slower stuff zapped off the track list altogether. Lead single "The System Only Dreams in Total Darkness" is one of the band's all-time creative high points and perhaps the closest to "fun" they've ever come, with Berninger skyrocketing to an emphatic roar on the chorus, shouting his ass off over barbed-wire guitar and stammering drums. Likewise, occasional flirtations with electronica and post-rock atmospherics offer a jolting verve: "I'll Still Destroy You" mingles digital percussion, marimba and glassy guitar arpeggios, climaxing in a mesmeric symphonic wash. On these high points, Berninger demonstrates a wider dynamic range than usual—from the half-hungover growl of "Nobody Else Will Be There" to the foaming-at-the-mouth yelp of "Turtleneck." *Sleep Well Beast* may tread water at times, but its subtle creative strides suggest The National are still eager to grow. ***Ryan Reed***

Blind Boys of Alabama

Almost Home BBOA



To put things into perspective, when the Five Blind Boys of Alabama—the name under which they performed at the time—first recorded in 1948, most of the 1960s' future rock and R&B heroes were still wondering how their lives would change once they got into junior high. Nearly 70 years later, **Blind Boys of Alabama**—with surviving octogenarian co-founders **Clarence Fountain** and **Jimmy Carter** still involved—continue to evolve. *Almost Home*, streaming exclusively on Amazon Music, divvies up the production four ways, with the tracks cut in four different cities. **John Leventhal**, who sat at the helm for the first three, collaborates on his segment with singer-songwriter **Marc Cohn** (Fountain and Carter, who still tours, each grab a co-credit). Interestingly, "God Knows Everything," a tune penned sans Blind Boys help, plays closest to the pure gospel vest. Later, **Vance Powell** and **Charles Driebe** utilize the songwriting talents of North Mississippi Allstars **Cody** and **Luther Dickinson** and **Oteil Burbridge** on the swampy "Pray for Peace," and **Chris Goldsmith** matches the group with Dylan's "I Shall Be Released," a song that you might feel needs a rest until you hear what these voices do with it. Finally, Los Lobos' **Steve Berlin**, keeps it rootsy, putting a Little Feat-esque backbeat on "I Can See," raving it up gospel-tent style on "I Kept on Walking" and closing it out in a grand way with massed vocals and plenty of jubilation on "I Was Called." Remarkably, given the pedigree, nothing about *Almost Home* feels retro—this is music that reaches across decades, belief systems and genres, its sole goal to spread some joy. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Alice Cooper

Paranormal EARMUSIC

"When The Beatles went onstage, everybody went, 'Oh, wow!'" said **Alice Cooper** in a recent interview with *The Times of London*. "When we went onstage, everybody took a step back." Cooper's wet and wild brand of '70s shock rock would hardly raise an eyebrow today, but that hasn't kept him out of the limelight. In 2015, as the opening act for Mötley Crüe's final tour, he and his tightly rehearsed, razor-sharp band made a habit of slicing and dicing the headliner, while later that year, video clips of a surprise mini-reunion with the remaining members of his original 1975 lineup at a Dallas book-signing by bassist **Dennis Dunaway** promptly went viral. It all led to the making of *Paranormal*, which features two new cuts with Dunaway, guitarist **Michael Bruce** and drummer **Neal Smith**, as well as guest throwdowns from Deep Purple's **Roger Glover** (on the glitzy title track) and ZZ Top's **Billy Gibbons** (on the Texas-style brawler "Fallen in Love"). U2's **Larry Mullen Jr.** splits drumming duties with Smith throughout the album. Thanks to the addition of six live nuggets from the current band's May 2016 date in Columbus, Ohio—including a hip-shaking version of "Billion Dollar Babies"—and to the steady hand of longtime producer **Bob Ezrin**, *Paranormal* embraces the past and the present more seamlessly than most rockers pushing 70 could get away with. And in typical Alice fashion, from "Dead Flies" to "Genuine American Girl," it's also a gleeful, gruesome, politically conscious and relentlessly campy hard-rocking experience. Of course, we'd expect nothing less. ***Bill Murphy***

The War on Drugs

A Deeper Understanding ATLANTIC

With **The War on Drugs**' fourth LP, *A Deeper Understanding*, **Adam Granduciel** continues to pull off a tricky balancing act between cathartic Heartland-rock and atmospheric psychedelia—two styles which, on paper at least, seem roughly as far apart as his native Philadelphia and the California coast, a region where his music would sound right at home. He's been massaging that sweet spot since his 2008 debut, *Wagonwheel Blues*, and every subsequent album has grown more lush and refined—each one step closer to some mythic destination that exists only in his brain. *A Deeper Understanding* never strays from that aim: Granduciel continues to layer reverb-heavy guitar leads, sweeping acoustic strums and motorik rhythms underneath a voice that, for better or worse, will never fail to recall the everyman grandeur of Bruce Springsteen, Tom Petty and Bob Dylan. But one backstory factoid proves important: The frontman crafted this set as a "band album," involving his studio collaborators a bit more than usual, and perhaps because of this, the energy level here reaches an all-time high. "Holding On" is a breathless rock anthem that, underneath its shimmering surface of glockenspiel and slide-guitar, chugs forward with the raw muscle of its New-Wave groove. And even when the tempo slows, like on the pure melancholy of "Strangest Thing," the song packs the force of a live performance rather than an overdubbed-to-death demo. "Am I just living in the space between the beauty and the pain?" Granduciel asks himself in a gruff croon. His songs, too, occupy that space—one that still feels all his own. *Ryan Reed*

Holly Bowling

Better Left Unsung

THE ROYAL POTATO FAMILY

Classically trained pianist **Holly Bowling** successfully eases listeners into her beautifully composed renditions of Grateful Dead chestnuts throughout her sophomore album, *Better Left Unsung*. A piano prodigy since age five, she was originally discovered for her complete transcription and piano-only recording of Phish's famed 2013 marathon "Tahoe Tweezer" from Stateline, Nev. For fans of symphonic music not well versed with the Grateful Dead's collection, the appropriately titled *Better Left Unsung* easily offers a glimpse into that musical world; her solo piano arrangements of standout tracks like "Wharf Rat," "Crazy Fingers" and the full "Terrapin Station" suite recast the iconic tunes' melodies as meticulously constructed classical compositions. The catalyst for the project was her reimagination of the Dead's June 18, 1974 take on "Eyes of the World" and, on record, the track swings from a tender piano showcase to a jazzy, "Linus and Lucy"-esque bounce. Throughout "Dark Star," a early jam-vehicle known for its ever-changing kaleidoscope of mystical tones, Bowling sublimely captures the entangled darker spaces and hallucinatory emotions that made the song the Dead's signature '60s offering. Though the tunes are composed, Bowling's improvisational spirit remains, making *Better Left Unsung* feel more pre-game party than cocktail hour background music. *Sarah Bourque*

Benjamin Booker

Witness ATO

To bear witness means to testify, to plainly state what is evident. But to simply witness can mean to observe from afar, to see something happening from the sidelines. "Do you need another reason to get up?" asks New Orleans' **Benjamin Booker** on "Witness," the title track of his sophomore LP. The song rides a steady piano and pounding beat, asking exactly how much racial injustice we're willing to see before taking action. In recent years, guest vocalist **Mavis Staples** has lent her voice to artists like Arcade Fire and Gorillaz, but she's especially suited to sing alongside Booker, their dual husky voices asking, "Am I going to be witness?/ *Just* going to be a witness?" No stranger to heavy, whiskey-soaked ragers—his self-titled debut was filled with them—Booker sounds charged on *Witness*. Lyrically inspired by James Baldwin and the Black Lives Matter movement and sonically indebted to T. Rex and Nirvana, the record is dedicated to the heaviness of truth, which Booker sings about in his signature gravelly voice over glam-rock grooves ("The Slow Drag Under"), strutting punk ("Right on You") and string-laden soul ("Motivation"). "When'd you become such a faithless man?" he asks on "Overtime," but he never sounds like he's lost touch with his own faith. Instead, he seems inspired by the most radical elements of the gospel. On closing track "All Was Well," he seethes like Jesus tossing out the money lenders in the temple, intoning, "If I have my way/ I'll tear this building down," over polyrhythmic guitars and grinding bass. *Jason P. Woodbury*

Antibalas

Where the Gods are in Peace

DAPTONE

It's too easy to rattle off the usual references to Fela Kuti when describing the sound of **Antibalas**. Without a doubt, the Afrobeat style still underpins everything the band does, right down to the politically charged message of "Hook & Crook," the jazzy, soul-inflected standout track from the Brooklyn collective's much-heralded sixth album (and their first since 2012's self-titled *Antibalas*). But true to their urban roots, there's a cosmopolitan bent to the band's aesthetic that has gradually risen to the top over the years. That's most evident in the sedulous delivery of frontman **Amayo**, who has become his own eye at the center of a gently swirling hurricane of creativity, from his compelling exhortation of "Extra, extra! Truth is golden, shines forever..." on the front end of the hard-grooving "Gold Rush" to his sumptuous Afro-futurist rap and lead vocal on the three-part excursion "Tombstown." Meanwhile, the band is hyper-attentive and pliable throughout, with the stellar horn section of **Martín Perna**, **Jordan McLean**, **Raymond Mason** and **Jas Walton** sparring adroitly in the second movement of "Tombstown," while the matchless rhythm section of **Nikhil P. Yerawadekar** (bass) and **Miles Arntzen** (drums) sounds connected at the hipbone on "Hook & Crook." Yes, Fela still looms large, but Amayo and his mates no longer need the name-drop to stand on their own. *Bill Murphy*

Foo Fighters

Bleachers

Gone Now RCA

Bleachers may have began as something of a side project for fun. guitarist and songwriter **Jack Antonoff**, but the New York group's second album solidifies the band as far more than that. *Gone Now* enlists producers like **Emile Haynie** and **Greg Kurstin** to work alongside Antonoff, and there's a sense of real sonic exploration throughout the tracks. Antonoff no longer seems constrained by the expectations set by his past work, particularly fun., and as both a songwriter and a producer, he uses *Gone Now* to test new waters. "All My Heroes" is an anthemic indie-pop tune with shimmery layers and a moody tone, while "Don't Take the Money" is a buoyant pop track centered on a surging, hook-laden chorus that features backing vocals from recent collaborator **Lorde**. Horn-laced "I Miss Those Days" has loose ties to Antonoff's emo background, both in lyrics and sound, as he reflects on what it was like to tour in a band at 16 years old. "I know I was lost, but I miss those days," he shouts, a reminder of what it's like to be forced to continually evolve as an aging musician. Antonoff ends the album with "Foreign Girls," a track about returning home when you know you've "been a stranger lately." Overall, *Gone Now* is a little bit scattered—as it explores different ideas and styles, the album loses some sense of cohesion. It's unclear whether there's a narrative thread beyond Antonoff himself, but maybe that's the point. *Gone Now* feels like a transitional piece, pulling Antonoff from days past into his future. *Emily Zemler*

Foo Fighters

Concrete and Gold ROSWELL/RCA

Dave Grohl has said he wanted to make "the biggest-sounding **Foo Fighters** record ever" when the band assembled at EastWest Studios in Hollywood to begin work on their ninth LP—just a block down Sunset Boulevard, as it turned out, from where Queens of the Stone Age were holed up to record *their* latest with producer Mark Ronson. That coincidence actually goes a long way toward pinning down *Concrete and Gold*; Grohl recruited pop producer **Greg Kurstin**, known for his work with Adele, Sia, The Shins, Foster the People and many more, to chase the Wagnerian dragon he had in mind and, in large measure, he found the fusion of heavy rock and Beatles-style pop he was going for. At times, it's a bit of a jarring marriage, with the anthemic single "Run" awash in towering waves of guitars and Grohl's voice squeezed through all manner of swirling Leslie

effects and distorted compression. "Dirty Water," a bouncy, sweet-sounding pop excursion that turns hard-edged about halfway through, is another head-scratcher, but like the rest of the album, it demonstrates the command of melody and artful key changes that Kurstin brings to the process, and which Grohl has grown into over the years as a songwriter with real gifts. The best of both worlds comes together on songs like "Arrows," a dark, hypnotic and slow-building ode to a mysterious femme fatale, and "Make It Right," a riff-heavy, psychedelic cut-time workout (with very nearly Bonham-esque drum work by **Taylor Hawkins**) that pivots on the fabulously inane chorus of "Hop on the train to nowhere baby, don't you wanna hitch a ride?" As ponderous and silly as that sounds, it's definitely a ride worth taking. ***Bill Murphy***

Stanton Moore

With You in Mind: The Songs of Allen Toussaint COOL GREEN

R&B legend Allen Toussaint once said, "I never thought of myself as a performer. My comfort zone is behind the scenes." On *With You in Mind: The Songs of Allen Toussaint*, **Stanton Moore** takes a similar stance, enlisting an arsenal of skilled musicians and singers to honor the late musician/producer/songwriter, whose death rattled the tight-knit New Orleans music scene in 2015. When he's drumming for Galactic, Moore supplies a musical heartbeat, a swinging rhythm that propels the band forward. He does the same here, laying the groundwork as funk and jazz stars like **Trombone Shorty**, **Cyril Neville** and **Maceo Parker** launch Toussaint's historic arrangements into the stratosphere. And while Moore mourns the NOLA legend's passing on soulful tracks like "All These Things," it's the lively numbers like "Here Come the Girls" and "Everything I Do Gone Be Funky" that act as his New Orleans jazz funeral, celebrating his legacy and cementing his place in the collective music consciousness. "The Beat" is the album's true thematic core. With lyrics pulled from Toussaint's own poetry, it chronicles how soul rhythms punctuate human history and continue to resonate in the present. It's a poignant idea to consider as Moore, his bandmates (**David Torkanowsky** on keyboards and **James Singleton** on bass) and all his guests breathe new life into these arrangements and craft a fitting, lasting tribute to a New Orleans icon. ***Raffaela Kenny-Cincotta***

Gogol Bordello

Seekers and Finders COOKING VINYL

Gogol Bordello, the gypsy-punk collective, is known for fusing world cultures and styles to create a vibrant sound. The group's members are from many countries—frontman **Eugene Hütz** hails from the Ukraine while others are from Russia, Ecuador, Ethiopia and the U.S. to name a few—and the number of influences is evident on the band's seventh full-length album, *Seekers and Finders*. Produced by Hütz in collaboration with band member **Boris Pelekh**, the album features the singer's usual impassioned fervor, which is particularly amped up in these tracks. Hütz sounds desperate, howling through the chorus on "Walking on the Burning Coal," an anthemic rock number, as well as on the rasping acoustic ballad "If I Ever Get Home Before Dark." It's Hütz who carries Gogol Bordello's music, steering the tone of their albums and ultimately determining the sensibility of each release—and here, there's an underlying feeling of uncertainty. "Saboteur Blues," one of the set's most raucous tracks, was inspired by philosopher René Descartes' teachings. On the song, Hütz implores the listener not to live in the past or the future, proclaiming that the philosopher must have meant something other than "I think, therefore I am." (**Regina Spektor** also pops up on a track, "Did It All.") While the album is undoubtedly compelling, it can be overly chaotic at times. Still, the idea that there can be a successful collaboration between cultures is appealing in this day and age, and Gogol Bordello's efforts are worth commending.
Emily Zemler

Larry Campbell and Teresa Williams

Contraband Love RED HOUSE

There are times on *Contraband Love*, **Larry Campbell** and **Teresa Williams**' follow-up to their self-titled 2015 set, when the music is so pretty that it may take a moment before you realize they're singing about some of life's greatest hardships. "The Other Side of Pain," the opening track, is so chirpy in demeanor, even as Williams sings "How's it feel to close your book of lies at the chapter/ where the sky above me drops its acid rain," that you have to confess that the song's title tried its best to warn you. When "Save Me From Myself" comes on next, with Campbell supplying the guitars (including pedal steel) and mandolin, and Little Feat's **Bill Payne** on the honky-tonk piano, you may think you're ready for it, but Williams' delivery is so aggrieved that she'll get to you anyway. So yes, *Contraband Love* is sometimes an uneasy record lyrically—addiction is a recurring theme, for one ("Three Days in a Row" is harrowing)—yet it's also one surprisingly rife with joyousness. Bolstered by the rhythm section of Brazilian Girls bassist **Jesse Murphy** and longtime Woodstock-area drummer **Justin Guip**, the married couple at the center of things puts honesty and directness above all—you may feel uneasy as they sing of the "Hit & Run Driver" ("a broken survivor, stunned and staggering, lost and lonely") or the "blood moon rising and it's burning bright" on "It Ain't Gonna be a Good Night," but somehow they make it all sound alright anyway. And hey, you also get **Levon Helm** in one of his final recordings, adding his traps to Carl Perkins' "Turn Around." If that doesn't make you smile, then nothin' will. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Mogwai

Every Country's Sun

TEMPORARY RESIDENCE LTD.

Mogwai's ninth studio album, *Every Country's Sun*, reveals itself slowly, building up to the Scottish band's signature post-rock swells. Opening track "Coolverine" grows over six minutes, eventually transforming from gentle instrumental hum to surging, static-laced riffs. It's an apt entry into the album because it's reminiscent of Mogwai's live performances, which rise from quiet to deafening and overwhelming over and over again. This album isn't necessarily just proof of their unique musical sensibility, though. After more than two decades, the musicians are still able to test new waters. In this case, that means employing harmonious vocals. "Party in the Dark" brings guitarist **Stuart Braithwaite**'s rarely heard voice to the forefront as he croons over a bed of lush, psych-tinged guitars. Songs like "Crossing the Road Material," a seven-minute track, are reminiscent of albums like 2008's *The Hawk Is Howling*, when Mogwai truly perfected the constantly growing instrumental rock song. These numbers, however, have a stronger complexity, and there's a reason that *Every Country's Sun* feels like a wall of fuzzed out, layered sound that raises itself around you—Braithwaite and his bandmates felt so affected by the world's social and political tumult, especially Brexit and President Trump, that they used the music as a means of self-protection. The songs are meant as a fortress, something that can contain you without letting the outside world in. That sensibility shines through.
Emily Zemler

Land of Talk

Life After Youth SADDLE CREEK

Seven years ago, **Land of Talk** released their sophomore full-length album, *Cloak and Cipher*, to critical acclaim. Soon after, in the midst of her band's growing buzz around the music world, frontwoman **Elizabeth Powell** absconded to her grandmother's cabin in Ontario and began her several-year hiatus from releasing music, which included losing an entire album's worth of songs intended for a solo record after a laptop crash and a health scare for her father, which helped her refocus on putting music into the world. Now, back with *Life After Youth*, Powell shows that the time away from her craft hasn't done anything to hinder her skill, delivering another set of dreamy, effective indie-rock songs. Recalling Jenny Lewis, with a direct yet lilting vocal approach, and a conversational tone that Powell says was inspired, in part, by discovering the stylings of Kurt Vile and Courtney Barnett, the album's lyrics frequently stand out in the foreground. At the same time, the production and instrumentation provide a solid foundation, as in the bass-heavy percussive pulse of "What Was I Thinking?" and the off-kilter keyboard ostinato and sparse guitar and drums of "Inner Lover." Lead single "This Time," one of the record's tracks on which Powell got some lyric-writing help from friend **Sharon Van Etten**, finds the singer searching for something but willing to carry on amid uncertainty—a good sign for the long-waiting fans of her music.
Matt Inman

Michael McDonald

Wide Open BMG

Even if in the past **Michael McDonald**'s singing has made you want to incinerate your headphones—and there are some who feel that way (remember the "bullet in the brain" scene in *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*?)—*Wide Open* is worth your time. After 17 years of recording Motown covers, R&B hits and Christmas songs, the former Doobie Brothers frontman and Steely Dan associate has pieced together a dozen new original tracks and populated them with support from some of the most virtuosic musicians in the biz: bassists **Marcus Miller** and **Willie Weeks**, guitarists **Robben Ford** and **Warren Haynes**, saxophonist **Branford Marsalis** and several others. You could tune out the voice and just listen to the jams and walk away more than satisfied. But you won't. On *Wide Open*, McDonald has cast away many of the dubious blue-eyed-soul mannerisms that defined his earlier style, digging deep into the core of these always-honest, sometimes-gritty, never-mannered songs and delivering them with sincerity, punch and heart. "Blessing in Disguise," the funky gem featuring Marsalis' seamlessly shimmery soprano solo, is simultaneously gutsy and sleek. The appropriately gospel-informed "Hail Mary" opener, with a guest vocal spot from McDonald's wife, **Amy Holland**, features electric guitar, Wurlitzer and a horn arrangement from the headliner, whose own lead vocal soars from note one. "If You Wanted to Hurt Me" and the finale, "Free a Man," are take-no-prisoners soul-rockers that give **Shannon Forrest**, the drummer throughout the album, the horn team and guitarist **Michael Landau** a hardy workout. Without losing any of his

most identifiable characteristics, McDonald has opened wide into a whole 'nother thing on *Wide Open*.
Jeff Tamarkin

Midnight North

Under the Lights TRAZMICK

Midnight North may call California home, but their third studio release, *Under the Lights*, is a love letter to the open road. Not surprisingly, the album was inspired by, written and perfected on tour, as the band crisscrossed the country, promoting their 2015 album *Scarlet Skies*. 11 tracks long, *Under the Lights* cycles through the spectrum of emotions that one feels when they're living out of a suitcase—from homesickness ("Back to California") to reckless abandon ("One Night Stand") to starry-eyed optimism ("Everyday"). The album moves quickly, reviving the image of the cowboy musician, a dusty stranger who blows through town only to disappear the next day. It's most apparent on "Roamin,'" which acts as the album's rock-and-roll heartbeat. Bolstered by **Connor O'Sullivan**'s driving bassline, guitarists/lead songwriters **Grahame Lesh** and **Elliott Peck**, along with organist **Alex Jordan**, sing with abandon: "I go roamin' roamin' northbound on the interstate, my mind is on the open road/ Too far away to turn back, but not close enough to care." It draws up images of American landscapes and hot stage lights, as soulful, harmonized vocals wrap around twangy guitars and crisp drums. Midnight North may have a steady gig as the house band at Terrapin Crossroads, but on *Under the Lights*, they ride together, charging down the highway, ready to sing their songs to whomever will listen. This album feels like a page torn out of a tour diary, and Midnight North are in it for the long haul.
Raffaela Kenny-Cincotta

Whitehorse

Panther in the Dollhouse
THIRTY TIGERS

With the tellingly titled *Panther in the Dollhouse*, Canadian duo **Whitehorse** have grown substantially bolder than before, shedding all hints of subtlety and replacing it with a kind of precociousness. From the ominous open of "Epitaph in Tongues" to the hip-hop delivery of "Boys Like You" and "Pink Kimono," it's evident that the husband-and-wife team of **Luke Doucet** and **Melissa McClelland** is all too eager to explore new sonic terrain—and, with it, a more dramatically dynamic direction. The result makes for a creative, contemporary pop record, and even if they appear willing to push the parameters at all cost, they guarantee an intriguing encounter all around. Solo, they were two very different individuals—Doucet, an ace guitarist and seasoned rocker, McClelland, a singer-songwriter with her own special verve. Yet after six years using the Whitehorse handle, not to mention multiple albums and EPs, they've honed a distinct dynamic. There's impertinent imagery—much of it having to do with the clash between domesticity and erotic expectation—and the pair deliver it through a brash and boisterous sound. Even when they put the brakes on the sizzle, there's an unsettling undercurrent that remains, immediately apparent on "Kicking Down Your Door," the dark and dire "Gracie" and the percolating, pulsating "Nighthawks."
Lee Zimmerman

Dead Cross

Dead Cross IPECAC

If you know the music of Fantômas—the twisted "dada metal" band founded in the late-'90s by former Faith No More frontman **Mike Patton**, Slayer drummer **Dave Lombardo**, The Melvins' Buzz Osborne and ex-Mr. Bungle bassist Trevor Dunn—then you may have an inkling of the kind of offbeat sonic territory that **Dead Cross** explores. Patton and Lombardo haven't recorded together since 2003 (for Fantômas's ostensible swan song, the 2005 album *Suspended Animation*), but neither one of them has lost a step, which is saying a lot, considering how hard they both push themselves. Patton takes charge from the start with his extreme vocal acrobatics on the opening "Seizure and Desist," a controlled burst of power that tests guitarist **Michael Crain** and bassist **Justin Pearson** right out of the gate. For his part, Lombardo is characteristically unreal; when he counts off and launches into the high-speed hardcore workout "Idiopathic" or the razor-precise head-banger "Shillelagh," it's almost physically exhausting just to *listen* to what he's doing, let alone groove along with him. The Dead Cross debut is angry, brutal and short—a slab of hardcore dread, paranoia and righteous catharsis that pays tribute to Slayer's legendary *Reign in Blood* with what it packs into a mere half-hour of music. *Bill Murphy*

Ear Crystals BY RICHARD GEHR

The search for other-world audio gems

Another Way Out. Italian drummer **Tiziano Tononi and Southbound**'s excellent *Trouble No More...All Men Are Brothers* (Long Song) opens with a mighty blast of horns and drums evoking Coltrane's wall of sound. The tune is the Allman Brothers "Whipping Post," and it's a galvanizing introduction to a guitar-less jazz album celebrating the Allman Brothers' "spiritual unity." **Marta Raviglia** gender-flips the vocals into something less testosteronic, and Tononi's arrangements breathe new color into these familiar blues with the help of accordion, violin and Latin percussion. The aforementioned "Whipping Post" turns out to be a sandwich with a dramatic "Midnight Rider" filling, while other tunes, such as "Hot 'Lanta," get more orthodoxly swinging makeovers.

One man's trashline. Brooklyn *bon vivant* **Kim Rancourt**'s *plum plum* (Clown Heroes) opens with the catchiest thing I've heard in ages ("Walking the Trashline Properties"), descends into a psychedelic abyss ("The Thing That Is") and reawakens as a golden gospel great ("Leave Your Light On"). Rancourt, a late-20th-century indie hellion of cult notoriety, is the bright-eyed child of the Velvets, MC5 and Iggy and the Stooges, and his band—Sonic Youth drummer **Steve Shelley**, Blue Öyster Cult bassist **Joe Bouchard** and balling guitarists **Don Fleming** and **Gary Lucas**—should be preserved in amber. Rancourt sings with a gleam in his voice and a glint in his eye, and his album deserves a special place in the Coney Island of your heart.

That (kitchen) sinking feeling. On *TOSS* (Polyvinyl), Japanese singer-songwriter **Shugo Tokumaru** oscillates between tersely deployed, candy-colored cartoon music and sincere guitar-accompanied crooning. His strategy consists of sampling, cutting and pasting together dozens of different instruments with an emphasis on tracks by Deerhoof drummer **Greg Saunier**. At his best, Tokumaru recalls the madcap whimsy of cartoon composer Carl Stalling ("Cheese Eye") and Frank Zappa at the Roxy ("Taxi"). Tracks like "Hikageno," however, suggest rock balladry on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

Saxophonus colossus. Indie-rock sax man **Colin Stetson** sounds like he arrived directly from the land of the ice and snow on *All This I Do for Glory* (52Hz). Following a reinterpretation of Polish composer Henryk Górecki's "Symphony No. 3" (his so-called "Symphony of Sorrowful Songs"), Stetson returns to solo mode, submitting an ancient bass saxophone to circular breathing and extensive miking (extending to his own body). Rolling repetitive tones whistle through the wind as pancake pads clatter against metal tubing. It's a "cruel, beautiful, infinitely sad sound," wrote Josef Skvorecky in his 1994 novella *The Bass Saxophone*, and Stetson makes it sound eerily close and personal.

Lost in the jungle. The prelude to George Foreman and Muhammad Ali's 1974 "Rumble in the Jungle" in Kinshasa, Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), included a three-night music festival headlined by James Brown, Celia Cruz, and other African-American and Latino performers. Until the release of *Zaire 74: The African Artists* (Wrasse), however, the performances of the great African musicians who joined them—**Franco & T.P.O.K Jazz Orchestra**, **Tabu Ley Rochereau**, **Mariam Makeba**, **Abeti and Abumba Masikini** and **Orchestre Stukas**—have regrettably gone unheard. Turns out that was a global cultural oversight you'd be a doof not to rectify.

Procol Harum

Novum EAGLE

"A Whiter Shade of Pale" was as essential to the heady 1967 musical landscape as anything and—even if it's the only song by them that most rock fans know—*Novum* proves that, half a century later, **Procol Harum** remains a vital artistic force. **Gary Brooker**, the vocalist, pianist and co-composer of the zillion-selling classic that started it for Procol and all that have followed, has been the one constant in the band's lineup since those early days, but the current band has been together for a decade and delivers quite admirably here. The greatest, and most significant, change is the complete absence of Keith Reid, the lyricist who Brooker has partnered with on nearly every Procol song since day one. Many of *Novum*'s words are supplied instead by **Pete Brown**, best known for his work with Cream, with the band itself sharing credits as well. How much of a difference that shift in authorship credits will make to even hardcore PH fans—and there are still many—is negligible, as it's all quite identifiably Procol. There's a whimsy in some of Brown's tunes: In "The Only One," the narrator insists, among other cryptic musings, "This whole world, I put it there/ I dreamed it up myself," while "Last Chance Motel" will make anyone think twice about the merits of an illicit dalliance. Other tracks—"Soldier" and "Sunday Morning" among them—take a more studious approach. Whatever he's singing about though, Brooker's remarkably intact voice and signature piano stamp this music instantly and unambiguously. *Jeff Tamarkin*

moe.

Live from San Francisco BROOKVALE

There's something a bit confusing about **moe.**—the stalwart, reliable jam-scene veterans—releasing a two-disc live

album in 2017. For one, the band's allowed taping for decades, making a standard-issue live album a bit irrelevant; for two, they've got a long history of releasing the best of their often-great shows as full-on three-disc releases, so die-hard fans can get physical copies as well. (It is important to note that this Record Store Day album came out before **Rob Derhak** was diagnosed with cancer and moe. subsequently went on hiatus.) So this disc—the best of the 2016 show at The Fillmore in San Francisco—should be looked at maybe as a primer on the band's newer material, with most of the cuts coming from the past decade of their catalog. That means highlights include the islandy "Puebla," complete with marimba fills, and an epic version of "Silver Sun," which has become a live staple for all of the helix-guitar reasons showcased here. "Opium," sometimes a show slow spot, has passion and purpose, thanks to Derhak's moving-it-along bass playing, and "Brittle End" is a songwriting showcase that proves that within the genre, moe. is still one of the few bands that cares about melody in the same breath as virtuosity. Songs often veer into unexpected territory, with dark moods and wah-wah fills as common as soaring leads. Sure, there's no old-school faves like "Meat" or "Rebubula" (or "Timmy Tucker," or insert song here) but you can get all those elsewhere. If it's been a while since you've dived into moe.'s repertoire, then you can do far worse for a reminder of the kind of anything-can-happen jams that made them great in the first place. *Jeff Miller*

The Isley Brothers & Santana

Power of Peace LEGACY

Amid the accolades that swept over last year's *Santana IV*, one key detail ended up as a footnote. Sure, the album marked a long-planned reunion of the classic 1971 lineup, with the return of Neal Schon in particular, obliging **Carlos Santana** to unleash a barrage of chops that many feared he'd abandoned for the warmed-over sound of 1999's *Supernatural*. But while all ears latched onto the guitar interplay between Schon and Santana, the percussive fervor of the two Michaels (Shrieve and Carabello) and whether Gregg Rolie could still bust a badass lead vox (short answer: yes), **Ronald Isley**, the album's lone guest artist, rather humbly nailed his two vocal takes, though no one seemed to notice.

That oversight gets addressed on *Power of Peace*, with the best of intentions. Santana has been an **Isley Brothers** fan since he was a kid—and what sane person with a heart wouldn't be?—so teaming up with Ronnie and his guitar-slinging brother **Ernie Isley** (a well-known Hendrix acolyte) is a no-brainer. What's more, it's a prime showcase for **Cindy Blackman Santana**, who had staked a hard-fought claim as one of the best drummers in rock long before her marriage to Santana.

With this many heavyweights in one room, a covers album was inevitable—but it's their quirky choices that really stand out. Who else but Santana would know to attempt the *Electric Mud* version of Muddy Waters' "I Just Want to Make Love to You," or that Eddie Kendricks' "Body Talk" and the Chambers Brothers' barn-burning "Love, Peace and Happiness" would inspire a fusillade of great licks from Ernie? Add to this a stunning flamenco-meets-reggae send-up of Curtis Mayfield's "Gypsy Woman," with Ronnie delivering the requisite goosebumps with his still-silky voice, and *Power of Peace* starts to live up to the higher spiritual plane that Santana always strives for with his music. It's diminished by moments of cheese—a throwaway rap by **Andy Vargas** on "Higher Ground," a misplaced ballad by Blackman Santana called "I Remember," a mellifluous bleat of Burt Bacharach and Hal David's "What the World Needs Now"—but, overall, *Power of Peace* is plugged into something positive and timely. *Bill Murphy*

Guided By Voices

How Do You Spell Heaven GBV INC.

It's no longer enough to describe **Robert Pollard** as prolific; since founding **Guided By Voices** in the early '80s, he's been involved in the making of one hundred albums, which he celebrated earlier this year with the release of GBV's first double-length opus, *August by Cake*, featuring 32 mostly lo-fi nuggets of garage-rock wisdom. So while everyone can agree that he's written a ton of music, the juicier question then becomes: How can we tell when he's changed direction? That's where *How Do You Spell Heaven* comes in. After spending most of 2016 whipping the current GBV lineup into road-ready shape, Pollard serves up a hefty slate of carefully crafted songs that propel him out of his comfort zone, dipping into Syd-like psychedelia ("The Birthday Democrats"), Bolan-esque glam ("Pearly Gates Smoke Machine") and even radio-bound dad-rock ("Just to Show You"), with nary a whiff of his hardscrabble indie roots. You can hear

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1 Joe Russo's Almost Dead

"Throwing Stones"
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Self-Released

Joe Russo's Almost Dead is Scott Metzger, Tommy Hamilton, Dave Dreiwitz, Marco Benevento & Joe Russo. We're a Grateful Dead cover band.

www.joerussosalmostdead.com

2 Buddha Council

"Sheep"
From the album *Consider This*
Self-released

In 2013, the Virginia reggae scene hatched Buddha Council from members of Bimini Rd. and Session Rockers. Instantly, they developed a unique take on Future Roots music. To date, Buddha Council has evolved into the perfect balance of musicians pushing genre boundaries, while simultaneously rediscovering forgotten rhythms of reggae's yesteryear.

www.buddhacouncilband.com

3 MISCOMUNICADO

"Love Hz"
From the album *Fun-Land Express*
Self-released

Originating in suburban Philadelphia, MISCOMUNICADO found home in Colorado and developed a sound they call "future classic rock." Their psychedelic blend of '60s rock with '80s funk and disco is filled with catchy hooks, soaring guitars and groovy rhythms that will keep you dancing, singing along and questioning your existence.

www.miscomunicado.com

4 Electric Love Machine

"Gemini"
From the album *Love Deluxe*
Self-released

Electric Love Machine is a Baltimore-based quartet that uniquely weaves elements of rock, electronic, pop, fusion and funk into a high-energy listening experience. ELM's new album "Love Deluxe" transcends genres and is available on all major streaming services. We hope you enjoy our music, message and live-show experience.…

www.electriclovemachine.com

5 The Copper Children

"Jack and Ginger"
From the album *What We Are*
Self-released

The Copper Children is an indie-rock band that set sail in Denver. Their unique sound is a blend of indie-Americana, rhythm and blues, and folk. Heartfelt lyrics dive deep into the human psyche, riding the crest of a wave of world rhythms straight to the soul.

www.thecopperchildren.com

6 South Hill Banks

"Lucy on the Brain"
From the album *Riverside Dr.*
Self-released

South Hill Banks is rapidly rising in the ranks of the progressive bluegrass scene, with a decidedly psychedelic sound drawing influence from a broad spectrum of improvisational music. The quintet channels an infectious camaraderie into wild live performances that have attracted a fanatical following in their hometown of Richmond, Va.

www.southhillbanks.com

7 Blind Boys of Alabama

"Pray for Peace
From the album *Almost Home*
BBoA Records

"Pray for Peace," from the Blind Boys of Alabama's new album Almost Home, is the band's version of a song submitted for them to record by the North Mississippi Allstars. Recorded in Nashville with Vance Powell (Chris Stapleton, Jack White), the track is foot-stomping, electrifying gospel blues for our troubled times.

www.blindboys.com

8 Albert Savage

"Side of the Road"
From the album
Savage on the High Seas
Self-released

Albert Savage is an American band influenced by rock, jazz and blues in their original sound. Albert Savage has been rocking festivals, venues and exclusive events on the East Coast since 2016. Their new album, "Savage on the High Seas," will be available on September 23. Become a Savage at albertsavage.net.

www.albertsavage.net

9 Skydyed

"Soundflower"
Single
Self-released

Emerging from Fort Collins, Colo., Skydyed is a three-piece band that blends cutting edge electronic production with live instrumentation. With roots in rock, funk and jazz, Skydyed has created their own, diverse sound that intertwines organic live drums, bass and guitar through soulful jam, hard-hitting bass and profound break-beats. With their unique and advanced production, Skydyed have established themselves as a can't-miss performance that bridges the gap between EDM and live music.

www.skydyedmusic.com

10 Chameleon Culture

"Dreamcatcher"
From the album *The Universe Is a New Year's Day Parade*
Self-released

Formed in October 2014, Chameleon Culture is an experimental-rock band making waves with their innovative sound and intricate lyrics. Currently residing in Brooklyn, N.Y. — and drawing inspiration from artists like Radiohead, Jeff Buckley and Pink Floyd — Chameleon Culture has a powerful and emotive sound that will shake the floor and tug at your heart strings.

www.chameleonculture.com

11 EDITOR'S PICK: Portugal. The Man

"Feel It Still"
From the album *Woodstock*.
Atlantic Records

Portugal. The Man has a new album called Woodstock. Fire up your goddamn air-horn sound effect because it's the best, hypest, dopest, most-relevant-to-aspirational-millennials-who-are career-conscious-but-also-believe-in-collective-positive-change album of the year. We don't say that just because 2017 is the year of low expectations. We say it because it's actually a great album.

www.portugaltheman.com

12 Jam OFF! Winner: The Bogart Jones Band

"Hello the Highway"
From the album *14th & Willow*
Self-released

The Bogart Jones Band — born from a green plastic tote full of notebooks by the kitchen table of a 160-year-old house in the middle of the heartland. A puzzle, years in the making, completed by brothers in peace, love, life and music. Bogart Jones = All or Nothing.

www.thebogartjonesband.com

The Who, for example, in the thick melodic breaks of "Diver Dan," while on "How to Murder a Man," he taps a sarcastic streak that's darker than usual, murmuring the line "Sociopathological liars invented the wheel in which they run in scholarly circles" with a pointedly creepy detachment that recalls Nick Cave or David Bowie. The band also switches moods and tempos with seamless ease; they flip the quiet acoustic intro section of "King 007" into upbeat, power-chorded bliss, and ride "Steppenwolf Mausoleum" in a mounting wave of guitars and backing vocals. As rare as it is for Pollard to sound this polished, it's clear that he's always had it in him. ***Bill Murphy***

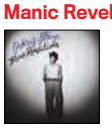
Cage The Elephant

Unpeeled RCA

Cage The Elephant has unveiled four full-length albums to date, culminating in 2015's award winning *Tell Me I'm Pretty*, and their subsequent Live & Unpeeled tour. Visiting nine cities including LA, Washington, D.C., Knoxville and Nashville, the band recorded each show along the way, resulting in their first live album, *Unpeeled*. For those expecting more tracks of boisterous rock, the album's stripped-down songs may come as a surprise. While it's an interesting exercise in song arrangement—often lending a '70s flair to the tracks—it also misses the dynamic propulsion that usually exists in a Cage The Elephant live performance. The Kentucky six-piece outfit is beloved for their unbridled energy, especially in a festival setting, so it's unusual to hear a lively hit like "Shake Me Down" pulled apart into a string-laced ballad or the single "Come a Little Closer" in a less energetic form. Sometimes the shifts work, like on cover track "Whole Wide World," which augments the emotional gravity of the lyrics to be the most potent sonic aspect of the song. Originally by Wreckless Eric (Eric Goulden), the song is an apt example of how Cage The Elephant can infuse their own signature style into any rock number. "Sweetie Little Jean," from *Tell Me I'm Pretty*, is similarly evocative, and this take only amplifies the song's heartbroken tone. Live albums are often a mixed bag, mostly because it's impossible to capture the raw vigor of a concert and it always feels like part of the experience is missing. While this is a solid effort, with some interesting new takes, fans may feel let down during some of the sluggish moments. Seek out the tour instead. ***Emily Zemler***

Pokey LaFarge

Manic Revelations ROUNDER



With a name like **Pokey LaFarge**—the handle for both the artist and his band—one might imagine an old-time troubadour who peddles his musical wares from one roadhouse to another, asking for nothing more than some coins tossed in his cup. LaFarge does nothing to discourage that perception and, over the course of his eight albums, he's remained true to a tradition that would make any modern minstrel proud. He bases his sound on a strict definition of Americana, using a guitar, a washboard, an upright bass and a brass section's ragtime revelry to provide his accompaniment. On his latest outing, however, he doesn't so much change his treatment as he does his disposition. Every track finds him expressing an enthusiasm that's barely contained, from the jaunty ("Riot in the Streets" and the effusive "Bad Dreams") to the jazzy (seductive "Mother Nature"). LaFarge and his seven-piece band showcase their upbeat attitude, making *Manic Revelations* true to its name. That celebratory stance permeates the entire album, and while LaFarge's playful persona may seem like an act, the sprightly sound that he and his bandmates create finds image and execution effectively intertwined. At this point in his trajectory, there's no denying Pokey has a certain spring in his step. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Broken Social Scene

Broken Social Scene

Hug of Thunder ARTS & CRAFTS

Seven years after 2010's *Forgiveness Rock Record*, **Broken Social Scene** offer another comforting bear-hug of indie-rock ecstasy. Every release is like a family reunion you actually circle on the calendar. Members drift in and out, popping up for sporadic tours and studio cameos, before retreating to their side-projects and main bands. But every so often, the stars align for a new LP, and the results are always more powerful than anything they cook up separately. Throughout *Hug of Thunder*, de facto bandleader **Kevin Drew** is joined by the now-standard core unit (co-founder/bassist/guitarist **Brendan Canning**, drummer **Justin Peroff**, multi-instrumentalists **Andrew Whiteman** and **Charles Spearin**) and a rotating guest crew, including three golden-voiced female vocalists (**Feist**, Stars' **Amy Millan** and Metric's **Emily Haines**). As usual, that heft is Social Scene's milieu. Their songs are labyrinths of guitar squiggles, layered voices and tumbling beats—a dizzying arrangement approach that they first perfected on 2002's *You Forgot It in People*. *Hug of Thunder* touches on all their hallmarks: windows-down indie-rock magic ("Halfway Home;" "Stay Happy"), jazzy post-rock haze ("Victim Lover") and post-punk bricolage ("Vanity Pail Kids"). After only appearing as a backing vocalist on *Forgiveness Rock Record*, Feist sounds reinvigorated here with an expanded role—her surreal wordplay and rapid-fire, staccato delivery on the title-track is the album's spine-tingling peak. But, as always, Broken Social Scene is a vehicle not for star turns, but for communal strength. "Friendship, ladies and gentleman, friendship," Drew told the *Late Show With Stephen Colbert* audience following their comeback TV performance. That just about sums it up. ***Ryan Reed***

Kronos Quartet

Folk Songs NONESUCH

For more than 50 years, the **Kronos Quartet** has provided the answer to the question, "I don't know much about classical music—where should I start?" Unlike many traditional chamber music outfits, the Kronos crew—currently longtime mainstays **David Harrington** (violin), **John Sherba** (violin) and **Hank Dutt** (viola), with more recent addition **Sunny Yang** (cello)—is determinedly progressive and daring in its outlook, always seeking a new means of expression and eager to collaborate. They've covered songs by Dylan and Hendrix, performed with Bowie, Tom Waits and McCartney (not to mention recorded with Dave Matthews Band) and see genre as a mere obstacle to be pushed aside. In 2014, the group joined with four of its Nonesuch Records compatriots—**Sam Amidon**, **Olivia Chaney**, **Rhiannon Giddens** and **Natalie Merchant**—for concerts in London and New York celebrating the label's 50th anniversary, then gathered in a studio to recreate the music. Each guest receives lead billing on two tracks, with Kronos keeping "Last Kind Words" to itself. That one is more age-old, back-porch string band than modern string quartet, and follows an eerie, hypnotic "Factory Girl" (a reworked traditional Irish number, not the Stones song) that finds Giddens' delivery, as always, note-perfect and moving. Merchant's "Johnny Has Gone for a Soldier" is tender and lush, unlike anything she's cut on her own and, like Chaney on her two tracks, operatic in reach. Amidon, on both of his tracks, "Oh Where" and "I See the Sign," achieves a balance between folk tradition and soul, but it's Giddens' finale, "Lullaby," that most successfully demonstrates the inherent experimental nature of the hosts and their zeal to constantly evolve in untold, unanticipated ways. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

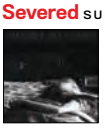
Girlpool

Powerplant ANTI-

For all the kids knocking around their local scenes, playing guitars and dreaming of making it big, let Los Angeles' **Girlpool** be your inspiration. Fronted by **Harmony Tividad** and **Cleo Tucker**, two early-twentysomethings who met just four years ago, the band has risen through the indie-rock ranks—and fast. *Powerplant* is their second album in as many years and finds the two expanding in the studio to a fuller sound—the addition of a drummer (**Miles Wintner**) will do that. But even with that extra rhythmic punch, they're keeping the songs rather simple. You get a sense that the Girlpool world is an insular one, where we're flies on the wall of someone dissecting a relationship and the world around them in real-time. On opener "123," they sing "How you're sorry you feel weird/ in a jubilation dream/ and you're sorry about the load," and on the jangly "Corner Store," they confess they're "napping on a plastic-coated living room." These abstractions pair well with the Girlpool sound, which owes a lot to the '90s shoegaze and alt-rock masters. *Powerplant* is anchored in guitar hooks and arrangements reminiscent of bands like the Breeders, PJ Harvey and Belly. It's hard to conjure up that vibe perfectly, but Girlpool is one of the better acts currently toying with blending melodic vocals with distortion, tension and release through loud and quiet moments, and packed tightly into two-minute numbers. They get in, get out and do it in catchy fashion. ***Mike Ayers***

Curse of Lono

Severed SUBMARINE CAT



"When they come for me, I'll run like hell," **Felix Bechtolsheimer** sings on "Five Miles," the opening track of **Curse of Lono**'s debut album, *Severed*. What is he running from? Take your pick: addiction, loss, infidelity, jealousy. This record is a Southern Gothic dissertation spread over 10 tracks, and Curse of Lono sound

Reviews

somewhere between Nick Cave and Wilco, or if The National had a morose Southern twin. Throughout *Severed*, frontman/lead songwriter Bechtolsheimer explores the dark underbelly of Americana, painting his sonic spaces in grayscale, with heavy shadows and stark contrast. There's no sunshine or flag-waving on this release. Instead, there are lessons learned, like how to bounce back from bad decisions ("Pick Up the Pieces") or shoulder the pain of a significant other ("Each Time You Hurt"). Yet, despite its dark themes, the album doesn't wade in depression as much as it projects a message of catharsis and self-recognition. With an acoustic guitar, and a few backup singers, *Severed* asserts that no matter how many skeletons reside in your closet, there's always time to clean it out.

Raffaela Kenny-Cincotta

Alvvays

Antisocialites POLYVINYL

Alvvays revolves around the acerbic songwriting of singer-guitarist **Molly Rankin**. The daughter of the late Celtic fiddler John Morris Rankin, she started finding her own footing as a teenager, blending her folk roots with a more jangly, melodic brand of modern indie-pop. The Canadian quartet—which also features, keyboardist **Kerri MacLellan**, guitarist **Alec O'Hanley** and bassist **Brian Murphy**—scored a No. 1 record on CMJ's college radio "most added" chart with their self-titled debut in 2014. They've been working on *Antisocialites* for the last two and a half years, and the care they put into the music shows on every track. Alvvays have an expansive sound that echoes the pop gems of the late '60s, an impressive feat for an album that was mostly put together in the band's basement studio. The opener, "In Undertow" plays like a Beach Boys track produced by Phil Spector with its massive wall of sound—O'Hanley's gigantic chiming guitar and Rankin's iridescent multi-tracked vocal bemoan the end of an unsatisfying relationship. Brittle guitar textures and cymbal splashes add a hissing dissonance to "Already Gone." Rankin's tragic vocal compares lost love to drowning, with odd synthesizer sounds giving the track an otherworldly ambience. Rankin rocks out on "Your Type," and the entire band's bursting punk energy adds urgency to the frustration she expresses about a guy too busy being self-destructive to pay attention to her. Grief and loss are the overarching themes to most of the songs, with the punched-up tempos balancing Rankin's resigned vocals to suggest the anger that is often lurking behind the feelings of a broken, abandoned heart.

J. Poet

The Como Mamas

Move Upstairs DAPTONE

There's a certain sanctity that comes through spiritual celebration, and given their lineage, **The Como Mamas'** glorified gospel sound provides its own form of exhortation. The three singers—**Ester Mae Wilbourn**, **Della Daniels** and **Angelia Taylor**—come from a family that boasts a rich background in heritage and history. Their grandfather held court on the porch of their Mississippi home and would often invite blues singer Fred McDowell to take part. In 1959, folk archivist Alan Lomax paid a visit and recorded a session for posterity. Now associated with the Music Maker Relief Foundation, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to preserving those rural roots, the three women are clearly committed to crafting a set that keeps a connection to timelessness and tradition. Backed by a group of skilled session players, their third album, *Move Upstairs*, stirs and sways with a conviction that owes nothing to modern mores or contemporary trappings. With songs that clearly reflect their devotion like "Almighty God Mighty God," "He's Calling Me" and "Glory Glory Hallelujah," the album rings and resonates with emotion and enthusiasm. Sung mainly in a pattern that typifies the practice of call and response, *Move Upstairs* sounds like it was propelled directly from the pulpit, spun off a revival or shared at a Sunday service. Secular audiences may need to ease themselves into the music, especially since the singers appear to be so wrapped up in revelry, but only a sceptic or cynic could shrug it off entirely.

Lee Zimmerman

Iron & Wine

Beast Epic SUB POP

As Iron & Wine, **Sam Beam** has always written about elemental things: time's ceaseless passing, the miscommunications of lovers and death. His first records, 2002's *The Creek Drank the Cradle* and 2004's *Our Endless Numbered Days*, established a foundation of hushed, autumnal folk, but he's spent much of the time since rewiring and augmenting his sound, both deconstructing it and burnishing it, instilling a new level of sophistication. His sixth album, *Beast Epic*, follows two collaborative records—*Sing Into My Mouth* with Ben Bridwell of Band of Horses and *Love Letter for Fire* with Jesca Hoop—and is a return to Sub Pop, Beam's original label. *Beast Epic* is clearly tethered to his earliest recordings—sparse, folk-based and largely acoustic, but it displays the lessons Beam learned

transmuting his Southern ballads into a hybrid of tropicalia and breezy jazz rock, as well. Opening with a whispered countdown, "Claim Your Ghost" shimmers with a confidence unheard on those early hushed bedroom recordings, but feels just as intimate. "Our music is clumsy and free," Beam sings, over the drums and sweeping violin that accompany his rattling acoustic guitar and multi-tracked voice. Recorded with his live band and longtime collaborators, the feel is loose and balmy. Beam's still singing about growing old (the gorgeous "Summer Clouds"), still quizzically probing how the language of faith speaks to shared brokenness ("The Truest Stars We Know") and still wondering how numbered our days truly are ("Our Light Miles"), but he's never sounded so comfortable. An embroidered illustration of Beam, who appears blindfolded, decorates the record cover, as if to suggest the need to navigate through instincts instead of sight. On *Beast Epic*, Beam finds his way.
Jason Woodbury

Lucy Rose

Something's Changing COMMUNION

From the start, **Lucy Rose**'s third album, *Something's Changing*, feels generous and raw. The songs, recorded with producer **Tim Bidwell** in Brighton, U.K., are almost remarkable in their openness—each twang of the guitar and each rise of Rose's voice reveals something intimate and true. The album arrived after the singer-songwriter spent two months traveling and touring around Latin America and Mexico, and she said that her experiences there gave her a newfound confidence. *Something's Changing*, which follows 2015's *Work It Out*, was laid down in a mere 17 days. The result is unfiltered and unbound, with Rose leaving most of the emphasis on her acoustic guitar and dulcet croon. "Floral Dresses," a track that features **The Staves** on vocal harmonies, strips the instrumentals down to their bones and allows the voices to carry the emotional heft of the song. "Find Myself" goes even sparser—the gently plucked guitar leans against Rose's aching lyrics, as she pensively sings, "I find myself/ I find myself within your dreams." There is a lot of searching throughout the album and, as *Something's Changing* comes to an end, on folksy "I Can't Change It All," it's clear that the singer has come full circle in her investigation within. Hopefully, her own search for meaning carries over to those who hear it. ***Emily Zemler***

Big Something

Tumbleweed SELF-RELEASED

Big Something have grown into festival favorites in recent years, thanks to their seamless blend of rock, jazz, reggae and funk, and *Tumbleweed*, the Burlington, N.C.-based act's

Ned Lagin

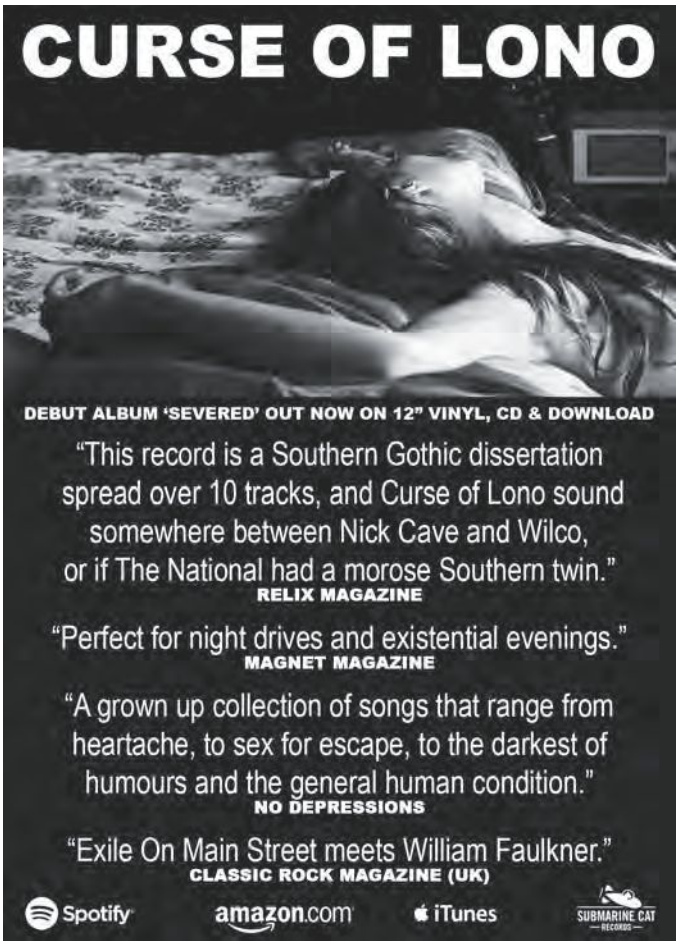
Cat Dreams SELF-RELEASED

Whether one has been waiting 40 years for **Ned Lagin** to follow up his 1975 debut or not, his long-time-coming *Cat Dreams* is bound to surprise. Far more consonant than the often harsh bio-music of *Seastones*—released by the Grateful Dead's Round Records and co-credited to Phil Lesh—*Cat Dreams* reveals a musician at play. The 17 wordless tracks move through a variety of approaches over 77 minutes—from solo electronic pieces to full-band double-drummer jams, from pedal-steel reveries to MIDI fantasias, from short improvisations to suites.

And while a handful of tracks are mired in synth swirl, they are outnumbered by the ideas and space that the album conveys. On "The Creek," over the gentle rush of water, Lagin's rich MIDI guitar counterpoint fits right alongside new post-John Fahey/Robbie Basho guitar heroes, while the evocative "Sun Cats" recalls the plinking dreaminess of "Nannou"-era Aphex Twin. Those hoping for more of the far-flung abstractions and modular weirdness of *Seastones* might be disappointed; the closest the album gets is a trio of floating and deeply textured Native American flute duets.

Also high on the list of surprises: the unexpected ways that the album channels the Grateful Dead. "Cat Licks" begins as a flurry of C&W, abetted by **Barry Sless**' pedal steel, and increases in density until it feels like a constantly cresting jam-peak. One of its partners in the three-part "Big Cat Dance" suite, "Cat Samba," sounds like something the Dead might've come up with in the '90s, give or take a few different creative turns, with a slinky groove whose lead melody is provided a MIDI-sampled voice. In these places and elsewhere, it's not hard to imagine Lagin's former jamming partner Jerry Garcia easily adding in his quizzical guitar.

If the album didn't find such a natural flow between more outré moments and "simpler" compositions, then like the semi-straightforward instrumental ballad "Teddy Sings a Love Song (How His Heart Sings)"—Lagin on synth cello, naturally—all of the mode-switching might feel like creative overload. *And though Cat Dreams* sometimes seems like a musician racing to catch up with himself, it is also unquestionably the work of a musician still chasing the future. ***Jesse Jarnow***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fourth LP, harnesses that live energy without cutting off their improvisational edge. Throughout eight extended offerings that weave snaking synth lines with spiraling twin guitars, subtle intrusions of sax and other brass, there's a forward motion that's nearly unstoppable. Indeed, for all their instrumental interplay, Big Something seems mostly concerned with maintaining obvious enthusiasm, and on songs such as "Song for Us" and "Passenger," they succeed. At times, they sound like early prog pioneers, particularly in the opening bars of "Blue Dream" when **Josh Kagel**'s synth sets the pace and the band follows faithfully. It finds Big Something abandoning their freewheeling finesse–along with **Nick MacDaniels** and **Jesse Hensley**'s vocals–and opting instead for a sound akin to interstellar overdrive. **Doug Marshall**'s booming bass grounds "The Flood" to a certain extent, but as always, the propulsive rhythms win out. Even the sci-fi clichés of "UFOs Are Real" are secondary when compared to its steady pacing. It's little wonder then that *Tumbleweed* rolls along so well. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Low Cut Connie

Dirty Pictures (Part 1) CONTENDER

Self-diagnosed revolution rock-and-roll dripping with "Johnny B Goode" swagger, **Low Cut Connie**'s *Dirty Pictures (Part 1)* provides satirical snippets of life in a politically revised America. The first look at the evidence is the all-too-real video for sludge-bucket single "Revolution Rock n Roll"–perfectly seedy black-and-white snapshots of a recent sold-out Philadelphia show and a FOMO-worthy after-party. The single spills over into the Stones sound on "Dirty Water," another grime delight. Lyrically, ballad "Montreal" best captures the humorous relent, with home-hitting lines like "gave conjunctivitis to my guitar" and, maybe more worrisome: "All my friends got herpes in Montreal, all my friends don't open their mouths at all." The track also let singer and pianist **Adam Weiner**'s bellyaching vocals come to a softer howl then the rest of the record, settling on a sound reminiscent of Eddie Vedder. Further down the line, the grit party continues through the Philly rockers classic Prince funk stunt "Controversy," pointing out, "Life is just a game, we're all just the same." In the end, he sings, "I wish we all were nude/ I wish there was no black and white/ and wish there were no rules." Their Jerry Lee Lewis-tinged rock on this new cut is more of the sticky grub that helped land bits of their 2015 release *Hi Honey* on NPR's World Cafe and their song, "Boozophilia" from the 2012 album *Call Me Sylvia* on Obama's summer 2015 playlist. ***Maria Jean Sullivan***

The Clientele

Music for the Age of Miracles MERGE RECORDS

It's tempting to think that the world's become too chaotic in the seven years since **The Clientele**'s last record for their lush, symphonic chamber pop to make much sense in present day. But on *Music for the Age of Miracles*, songwriter/lyricist **Alasdair MacLean** doesn't isolate himself from reality in the dreaminess of his music. "This is the year that the monster will come," Maclean sings on "Lunar Days." Dread, it seems, lurks around the corner. But soft-psych ballads like "The Neighbour" and "Everyone You Meet" comfort–wistful in the same way classics like "(I Can't Seem to) Make You Mine" from *Strange Geometry* and *God Save the Clientele*'s "Here Comes the Phantom" are. The long break gave MacLean and his London-based band plenty of time to experiment–minimalist interludes "Lyra in October" and "North Circular Days" isolate the orchestral grandeur from the band's usual pop aesthetic and "The Circus" sprawls out like a Paisley fever dream, complete with 12-string guitars approximating sitars. "Everything You See Tonight Is Different From Itself" picks up some of the disco-flavored vibes of *God Save the Clientele*, pairing fuzz guitars and a stutter-step beat. As a solid 47 minutes of music adhering to its own logic, *Music for the Age of Miracles* could be a respite from the rush of modern days, but MacLean's offering something more substantial than escape. On the title track, he sings of the "dance of our days," the careful balance required to navigate constant information and stimuli. We can only be astonished if we allow ourselves the space to be wowed, and The Clientele create just that. ***Jason Woodbury***

Filthy Friends

Invitation KILL ROCK STARS

It's hard to resist the "super group" term in regard to **Filthy Friends**, the new alt-punk collaboration featuring **Corin Tucker** (Sleater-Kinney), **Peter Buck** (R.E.M.), **Scott McCaughey** (Young Fresh Fellows, Minus 5), **Kurt Bloch** (The Fastbacks), **Bill Rieflin** (King Crimson) and **Linda**

Pitmon (The Miracle 3). But while that descriptor usually conjures up images of bands unable to live up to pedigrees, Filthy Friend's full-length debut, *Invitations* doesn't suffer from comparisons to its creators' main gigs. The record brims with hooky rock-and-roll, knotty post-punk and psychedelic ballads, bringing to mind some constellation of the Go-Go's, Television and Big Star. On "The Arrival" and "Makers," Tucker lets her distinctive yelp loose over chiming guitars and chugging Ramones-style riffs, but she sounds best on "Any Kind of Crowd," front runner for this year's best power-pop song, a perfect blend of Byrds-style jangle and a vibe that brings to mind the Records' transcendent "Starry Eyes." *Invitations* never feels low-stakes. Indeed, the band launched itself with "Despierta" as part of the anti-Donald Trump 30 Songs in 30 Days campaign. The song, included here as an opener, stings more in the wake of Trump's election than it did when it seemed impossible he'd win—with lines like "holding onto the past won't make it repeat"—but it still serves as a triumphant and hopeful rebuke. No one's interested in capturing past glories here; they're making brand new ones. *Jason Woodbury*

Joe Bonamassa

Live at Carnegie Hall – An Acoustic Evening MASCOT LABEL GROUP

Jonny Lang

Signs CONCORD

The blues are at the root of all American music, but every bluesman has a different take on the genre. For his second all-acoustic outing, **Joe Bonamassa** assembled an international cast, including Egyptian percussion ace **Hossam Ramzy**, **Tina Guo**, a Chinese cellist and erhuist (a two-stringed Chinese spike fiddle), pianist **Reese Wynans**, drummer **Anton Fig**, multi-instrumentalist **Eric Bazilian** and three backing vocalists. This two-CD set isn't world music, but the players move Bonamassa's hits in unexpected new directions. "This Train" speeds down the track driven by the interlocking percussion of Fig and Ramzy, with Guo's cello and Bazilian's slide guitar complimenting Bonamasso's flying fingers. Bonamasso's subtle bent note solo on "Drive" has a traditional cast, while Fig and Ramzy complement Bonamasso's chord clusters on "Dust Bowl" with tight, funk-flavored interlocking beats. Guo's Celtic bow work and Bonamasso's subtle introduction on "Black Lung Heartache" is a highlight, as is Wynan's gospel-tinged piano and Bonamasso's growling vocal on the 1920's protest song "How Can a Poor Man Stand Such Times and Live."

Jonny Lang, meanwhile, takes a mainstream approach on *Signs*, with co-producers **Drew Ramsey** and **Shannon Sanders** adding a bit of gospel, funk and roots to the mix. "Make It Move" has the sound of a chain-gang holler with stomping feet and rumbling baritone backup singers supporting Lang as he wails the lyrics with a tortured howl. His aggressive, distorted guitar opens "Last Man Standing," a defiant gob in the face of the everyday forces that grind us down, while **Barry Alexander**'s ferocious backbeat sets up Lang's blistering solo. "What You're Made Of" opens with a flurry of guitar notes, before settling into a reggae accented Motown groove to deliver an uplifting message that encourages us to keep the faith, even when the night is the darkest. *J. Poet*

Dent May

Across the Multiverse CARPARK

Mississippi-born **Dent May** got his start strumming a ukulele to accompany his tuneful, retro-pop ditties. *Across the Multiverse*, his fourth album, was written and recorded in his bedroom studio after moving to Los Angeles a few years ago, which may be fitting as his music often calls to mind Brian Wilson, Harry Nilsson and other Angelino icons. As you might expect from the title, the album is concerned with astronomical distances and expansive expressions of love. But in May's universe, those feelings remain as remote as stars and, at times, are just as cold and unapproachable. His delicate, expressive melodies are steeped in melancholy and delivered in a yearning falsetto that croons lyrics that blur the boundaries between fantasy and reality, heaven and earth. The low-key production lets these mid-tempo serenades float through the air like muzzy daydreams, full of longing and unrequited love. He begs for affection in "A Little Bit Goes a Long Way," a harmony-drenched ballad that suggests Frank Sinatra fronting The Beach Boys, with a hint of reggae

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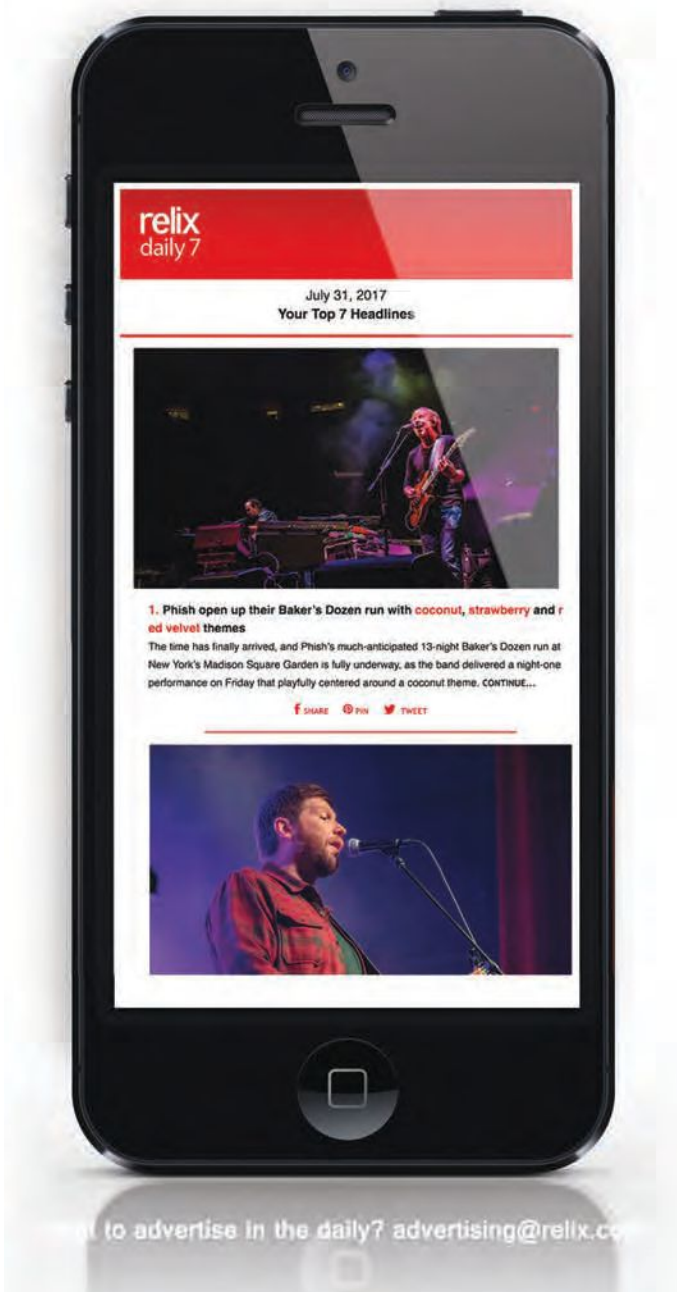
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daily 7
July 31, 2017
Your Top 7 Headlines
1. Phish open up their Baker's Dozen run with coconut, strawberry and r
ed velvet themes
The time has finally arrived, and Phish's much-anticipated 13-night Baker's Dozen run at New York's Madison Square Garden is fully underway, as the band delivered a night-one performance on Friday that playfully centered around a coconut theme. CONTINUE...
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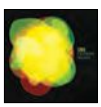
giving the chorus an unexpected twist. "Don't Let Them" is an interstellar waltz that finds May trying to escape from the galactic doldrums that keep him immobilized. After five tunes exploring alienation and missed connections, he dons his second-hand clothes and visits "90210" for a party that allows him to drown his sorrows sipping champagne under a palm tree while he guides his gal through the caviar days and plastic-surgery nights of Beverly Hills. But come the end of the track, he soon heads back to space. ***J. Poet***

Luna

A Sentimental Education
A Place of Greater Safety

DOUBLE FEATURE



A **Luna** reunion never seemed likely. After they disbanded in early 2005, frontman **Dean Wareham** wrote *Black Postcards: A Rock & Roll Romance* about his time in the band, while a documentary about Luna's final days, *Tell Me Do You Miss Me*, made the case that the band was a thing of the past. Evidently, that wasn't meant to be the end, as they recently got back together for some live shows and are releasing two new recordings: a short, 22-minute instrumental EP called *A Place of Greater Safety* and an album of 10 covers, appropriately called *A Sentimental Education*.

Longtime Luna fans may feel a bit of a sting with the instrumental offering—Wareham's effortlessly cool vocals have always been one of the band's signatures. But within seconds of the first track "GTX3," it's clear that Luna's gift for crafting melodic numbers is well intact.

On the cover album, the band tackles deeper cuts from big artists like Velvet Underground's "Friends" from their final album *Squeeze* and "Most of the Time" from Bob Dylan's 1989 *Oh Mercy*.

But perhaps what sums up Luna's place right now comes with the final number, a six-minute version of Mercury Rev's "Car Wash Hair," where Wareham pontificates: "If I'm not in a band, don't mean I'm square/ And if I am, well then I don't care." The song mixes psychedelic guitar flourishes with a driving drum line that slowly builds up to a grand finish. So is this foreshadowing the future without any more Luna? Hopefully not. ***Mike Ayers***

Lee Ranaldo and the Dust

Electric Trim MUTE

On "Moroccan Mountains," the sprawling opener of **Lee Ranaldo**'s *Electric Trim*, the Sonic Youth founder intones, "For 20 years or more, we had our screwdrivers out/ trying to disassemble the panels." Likely not a literal invocation—SY spent approximately three decades taking apart the rock music with avant-garde glee and inventive destruction—the song finds Ranaldo looking back wistfully. Alongside his band **the Dust**, which features Sonic Youth's **Steve Shelley** and guitarist **Alan Licht**, Ranaldo turned to Barcelona producer **Raül "Refree" Fernandez**, vocalist **Sharon Van Etten**, and Wilco guitarist **Nels Cline** for additional sonic touches, including electronic beats, delicate harmonies, bold horn sections, washes of synth, pop attitude and acoustic ragas. It's an exceptionally mixed batch of songs. The title track rides a familiar art-rock riff before erupting into a joyful affirmation of fearlessness and "Purloined" locks into a Krautrock/ progressive mode, bolstered by positively hooky melodies. On the mellow "Last Looks," redolent with soft rock and country ambiance, Ranaldo and Van Etten duet, his distinctive honk wrapped with her lilting voice like an art-damaged Lee Hazlewood and Nancy Sinatra. Ranaldo's lyrics, many written in collaboration with novelist **Jonathan Lethem**, mark the best of his career. On the jaunty "Uncle Skeleton," which lands somewhere between disco Dead and Ennio Morricone, Ranaldo and Lethem evoke the most gruesome moments of the novelist's 2016 book, *A Gambler's Anatomy*. ***Jason Woodbury***

Joywave

Content

HOLLYWOOD RECORDS/CULTCO MUSIC

Joywave's second album, *Content*, opens with the title track, on which singer **Daniel Armbruster** muses, "Maybe I'm just an algorithm with a given name" over a haze of synth layers. It's an apt introduction to the album, which was produced by Armbruster and bassist **Sean Donnelly**. The songs expand on the ideas presented in the Rochester, N.Y.-based quintet's 2015 debut album *How Do You Feel Now?* and explore both intellectual and emotional complexities through songs like "Shutdown" and "Let's Talk About Feelings." The band members are clearly deep in thought, considering their place in the world and investigating the consumerist culture we live in. "Going to a Place," a mid-tempo indie-pop number, reflects on a "place where everybody's pretty but they're all damn vacant inside," while the pulsating "Little Lies You're Told" is about the societal untruths that surround us. On "When You're Bored," Armbruster admits that the TV won't hold his attention because he can't stop thinking about a lost love. It's a more sentimental moment for the band, a reminder that a genuine heartbreak number is just as important as an existential one.

Joywave's debut is compelling, especially when performed live, but *Content* is even more so—it seeks to determine our identities as individuals and within a greater context. But listening doesn't have to be a solely cerebral experience—thanks to the lush soundscapes and layers of synth, you can simply press play and enjoy. ***Emily Zemler***

Queens of the Stone Age

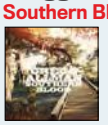
Villains MATADOR

Following 2013's *...Like Clockwork*, **Queens of the Stone Age** mastermind **Josh Homme** took several detours on the road toward recapturing his creative spark. Like a musical nomad, he collaborated with old friends (donating a vocal cameo to indie-rock act Arctic Monkeys), heroes (playing on and producing punk legend Iggy Pop's 2016 LP, *Post Pop Depression*) and unexpected pop stars (co-writing two Lady Gaga songs for her soft-rock-tinted LP *Joanne*). Reinvigorated by that zig-zagging process, he recruited Gaga co-writer **Mark Ronson**—a pop expert best known for working alongside Bruno Mars and Adele—to produce Queens' seventh LP, *Villains*. For hardcore fans, it was a perplexing pairing: Would the "Uptown Funk" dude cramp the band's stoner-rock style? Lead single "The Way You Used to Do" was a worrying first sign—with its rote, boogey-ing riff and by-the-numbers falsetto croon, it felt like a dumbing-down, as if Ronson had polished off their proggier, weirder edges. But breathe easy, Homme-heads: *Villains* offers a giddy, grimy zest that echoes 2007's *Era Vulgaris*, without sacrificing their trademark muscle or mayhem. "Domesticated Animals" veers from art-metal riffage to a psychedelic nursery rhyme; "Un-Reborn Again" stitches together sci-fi synths, chicken pickin' guitars, baroque-pop strings and a hilariously random quote from Georgia Satellites' "Keep Your Hands to Yourself." What other band on the planet would be so bold? ***Ryan Reed***

Queens of the Stone Age

Gregg Allman

Southern Blood ROUNDER



In the liner notes for *Southern Blood*, Devon, **Gregg Allman**'s son, writes that his father "wanted to leave you a most poignant, soulful and deep parting gift as he left us all." It would have been easy, one imagines, for Gregg to have rallied the troops one last time and called on the surviving members of the Allman Brothers Band to join him in that endeavor, but *Southern Blood* is too personal a statement. It needed to be in his name, a meditation on what producer **Don Was** describes in his own notes as "closing the book on the pages and text and urging those behind him to follow their hearts."

Of its 10 tracks, only the opener, "My Only True Friend," bears a Gregg Allman co-writing credit (with **Scott Sharrard**, his solo band's guitarist and musical director). It's a misty, mid-tempo blues number, with Gregg's vocal delivery as naked as anything he's ever sung. "You and I both know this river will surely flow to an end/ Keep me in your heart and keep your soul on the mend/ I hope you're haunted by the music of my soul when I'm gone," he sings, and it's not a conceit for a fan to take his words as a direct missive from an old companion.

There are many such moments on *Southern Blood*, but there is never a sense of sorrow or regret. "I will walk alone by the black muddy river/ and sing me a song of my own," he repeats in the Garcia-Hunter ballad "Black Muddy River," played acoustically in a nearly buoyant arrangement infused with all of the expressiveness Allman could muster, as he knew his own time was drawing near. And the determination to ever "be movin'" at the heart of the oft-recorded Lowell George classic "Willin'" takes on new meaning, coming from a lifelong traveler whose band's motto was "the road goes on forever."

Southern Blood isn't about the jam—although Allman plays both guitar and his beloved Hammond B-3—it's the songs and their vital words that are at the core of this statement. Was' production is accordingly understated, casting its light squarely on that voice and what it's telling us. The final track, **Jackson Browne**'s "Song for Adam" (to which he contributes a guest harmony vocal), tells of a mate lost long ago and still missed. "I did not know him long," Gregg sings, his mind perhaps summoning up his brother Duane, who died at the young age of 24. "It seems he stopped his singing in the middle of his song." Now, the narrator is well aware that it's his turn, "holding out my only candle" as it grows "shorter every hour." As in the sendoff track, there's a plea, a hope, that he'll be remembered. Gregg Allman didn't have to worry about that. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

PLUNDERING THE VAULTS

Phish

6/17/94, Eagles Ballroom, Milwaukee, WI LIVEPHISH RELEASE

Phish had a banner year in 1994 for many reasons. They performed The Beatles' "The White Album" as their first Halloween costume concert, offered two complete renditions of Gamehendge and made their first-ever appearance at Madison Square Garden. But rarely does an event happening in the real world collide with a Phish show as much as it did on June 17, 1994, the day O.J. and his white Ford Bronco went on the run and captivated the world. This show, simply known to many as "The O.J. Show," became an instant classic. As the second set started up with a punchy "2001," the band made it clear that they'd been watching the news, referencing Simpson's trek with lines such as "Whaddya say, O.J.?" and later "Run, OJ, run." The show really kicked into high-gear jamming with the start of "Mike's Song." **Trey Anastasio**'s guitar is powerful and feisty, eventually leading the band into a very early version of "Simple." The night was only the second performance of the now-classic tune, this time with an adlibbed line asking, "What is a band without OJ?" The events also inspired a Jimi Hendrix-lined version of "Harpua," featuring Anastasio meandering through the "Jimmy" story for much longer than normal. Their first set is no slouch either. Excellent versions of a mid-set "Split Open and Melt," "Bathtub Gin" and "Scent of a Mule"—a then-new song in the band's rotation—set the stage for what would become a legendary performance. Now, of course, the OJ story has become about so much more than a car chase, but this slice of '94 Phish is a great reminder that the band can improvise with the world in real-time.

Mike Ayers

Allen Ginsberg

The Complete Songs of Innocence and Experience OMNIVORE

Allen Ginsberg was one of the most influential and controversial poets of the 20th century, but he wasn't a singer. Nonetheless, Ginsberg didn't let any dearth of skills curb his revelry: He quite often vocalized, whether chanting or setting poetry to music, performing at various times with the likes of The Clash and Bob Dylan. Among his best-known musical endeavors was this 1970 album, billed as being "by William Blake, tuned by Allen Ginsberg." On the original MGM release, Ginsberg took the poetry of Blake (1757-1827), originally published in 1789 ("Innocence") and 1794 ("Experience"), and placed the works within a variety of contemporary musical settings. Ginsberg provided the primary vocals and, occasionally, accompanied himself on the harmonium. He was also joined by fellow poet (and life partner) **Peter Orlovsky** as well as several accompanists—including jazz musicians **Bob Dorough**, **Don Cherry** and, on the final track, "The Grey Monk," drummer **Elvin Jones**. This first-time CD and digital release expands on the original by adding a bonus take of "The Grey Monk" and an entire second disc's worth of more Blake songs—several of them first issued on a Ginsberg boxed set, and the others previously unissued—as well as a few mantras. So, is it good music? It's fascinating, to be sure—you've definitely heard worse attempts at marrying poetry to song—and, at its best, Ginsberg's intonations and somewhat droning delivery are captivating, impassioned and often haunting. While most of the tunes are under two minutes, his ability to match Blake's words to then-happening folk-rock/jazz-based forms was uncanny, and his grasp of their inherent rhythms and melodies was irrefutable.

Jeff Tamarkin

Radiohead

OK Computer OKNOTOK 1997 2017 XL

One of **Radiohead**'s most endearing qualities is their refusal give up on a great song—or even an OK song. Onstage in 2001, the

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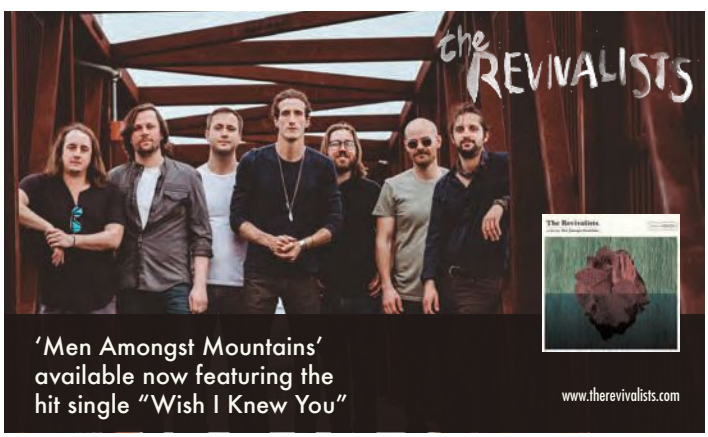

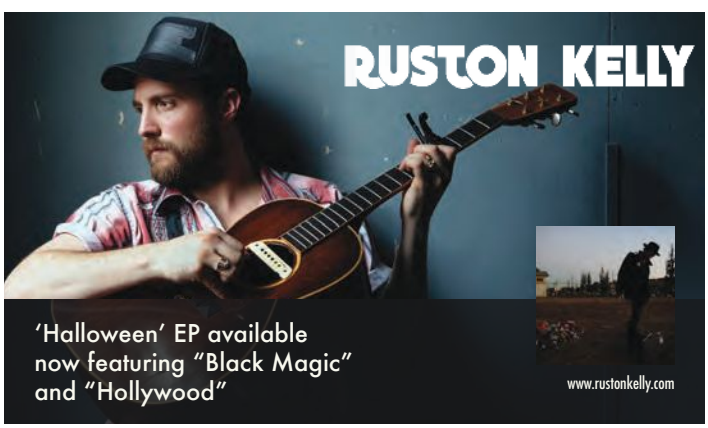

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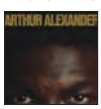
band unveiled "Reckoner," a dissonant rocker highlighted by **Thom Yorke**'s untamed wail. Six years later, that song title appeared on the track list for their seventh LP, *In Rainbows*. But the music sounded totally unfamiliar—now a grooving, falsetto-laden pop song instead of a feral guitar jam. The arrangement had evolved and their persistence had paid off. In recent years, Radiohead have unearthed and reworked other seemingly forgotten tracks: "Nude," "Morning Mr. Magpie" and most recently the spectral piano ballad "True Love Waits." But the band's three most coveted, forum-obsessed rarities—"Lift," "I Promise" and "Man of War," all recorded and discarded during the *OK Computer* sessions—had started to fade from collective memory. Now, with the album's 20th anniversary reissue, *OKNOTOK*, they're finally here—and they're spectacular. While hardcore fans may spring for the vault-cleaning box set edition featuring Yorke's handwritten lyric scrawls and a cassette of archival demo tapes, the true selling point is that trio of unheard tracks. "Lift," which guitarist **Ed O'Brien** once dismissed as "bogshite," is a euphoric rock anthem with adorably dated distortion and the sort of chorus yelp that birthed Coldplay's career; "I Promise" is Yorke in pure "pretty" mode, ascending to angelic falsetto over acoustic strum and mellotron; "Man of War," best known for its teaser in band documentary *Meeting People Is Easy*, is more of a paranoid android, full of noisy guitar shards and ominous grooves. The set also includes a remastered version of *OK Computer* and its numerous B-sides, but let's face it: You can't improve upon the original, and you'll hardly notice a difference. Nonetheless, *OKNOTOK* is miraculous, fleshing out the full picture of a game-changing masterpiece. ***Ryan Reed***

Radiohead

Arthur Alexander

Arthur Alexander OMNIVORE



When this record was originally released in 1972, **Arthur Alexander** already had some significant success—big artists like The Rolling Stones, The Beatles, Dusty Springfield and George Jones had covered his songs in the '60s—but since then, he'd mostly vanished. Alexander, who came from the musically fertile Muscle Shoals area of Northern Alabama, had been steeped in soul, blues and country. Warner Brothers Records signed him in 1971, in hopes of a hit in the R&B market, but the label—and radio stations—didn't quite know what to do with Alexander's sensitive country-tinged sound. His style has more in common with Aaron Neville, Percy Sledge, Dobie Gray or even Bobbie Gentry, but one can hear a connection to the mellower side of Otis Redding as well. Alexander was always more plaintive than funky. His phrasing was stilted at times, but his singing was always tender. This record, which was conceived as a kind of comeback for Alexander, was recorded in Nashville, Tenn., with a number of session players from Memphis. Of the original 12 tracks, Alexander wrote or co-wrote five, and just-emerging country writer **Dennis Linde** wrote four, with others contributing as well. This deluxe reissue includes an additional six bonus tracks, along with new liner notes and the originals both by **Barry Hansen** (Dr. Demento). There are story songs, like the music-biz saga of "Rainbow Road" and the stolen love heartache of "Go on Home Girl," as well as the slow-burn religious fervor of "Thank God He Came." Alexander died in 1993 at the age of 53, after moving his family to Cleveland, Ohio where he worked as a bus driver and janitor and found solace in religion. A month prior, he'd released the album *Lonely Just Like Me* via Elektra/Nonesuch. ***John Adamian***

Mulatu Astatke

Mulatu of Ethiopia STRUT

This reissue of **Mulatu Astatke**'s 1972 Afro-jazz-funk album, recorded in the U.S., is filled with squishy organ grooves, coiled horn-section work, subdued polyrhythmic drumming and Astatke's vibes playing. It brings to mind some of Ellington's travel suites, like *Afro-Eurasian Eclipse* recorded in 1971. (Astatke, known as the father of Ethio-Jazz, got to join the Ellington Orchestra during an Ethiopian tour in 1973, one year before Ellington's death.) East Africa has always been a place of cultural confluence, with elements of sub-Saharan, Arabic and Southeast Asian aesthetics swirling together. Astatke's music, which was written after some time spent studying at Berklee in Boston, threaded elements of Latin jazz as well, with a slow-samba feel juxtaposed with a Middle Eastern mode. The results were both spacey and meandering, yet rhythmically propulsive. At times, it sounds like a collaboration between the funk machinery of The Meters, a Curtis Mayfield soundtrack and the Afro-mystic excursions of the Sun Ra Arkestra. A series of different five-note scales is central to the music. The pentatonic scales in Ethiopian music have a lot of chromatic movement, giving them a quality that might sound exotic to those raised on Western music, while retaining a sense of space and warmth. "Mascaram Setaba" sounds like a woozy wah-wah soul bossa nova, with shivering flute lines floating over the glow of vibes. Dense unison horn lines on "Dewel" break into group improvisation, creating a ritual ecstatic atmosphere before sliding back into a hard-bop main statement. The rhythmic hiccups, twists and brief sprints on a song like "Kasalefkut-Hulu" sound like Arabic bebop. ***John Adamian***

U2

The Joshua Tree 30TH Anniversary Edition ISLAND/UNIVERSAL

Nothing is as interwoven with the songs of *The Joshua Tree* as **Anton Corbijn**'s photographs. There's a majesty to the album, and those black-and-white desert portraits created another world for fans, an iconography and mythology that the band continues to utilize today. The fact that this lavish, rather stunning box set ups the ante on that iconography is one of the many things it gets so right, from the shimmering gold Joshua Tree on the cover and the Corbijn outtakes wrapping the original album (a double-LP gatefold here) to the stand-alone prints collected in a slip case. But the most fascinating inclusion and the jewel of the set by far is the hardbound collection of ace photographs by **The Edge**, who captures sweeping California desert landscapes, intimate moments with his bandmates and Corbijn at work. The black and whites offer new perspectives on these legendary sessions, while still being fun and lighthearted. The packaging and photographic victory lap continues with the jackets and sleeves included in the new *Live at Madison Square Garden* double LP (fantastic B&W live shots) and the six-side collection of outtakes, B-sides and remixes.

If many of the songs on the original album were rooted in sadness and anger (the death of a friend, striking miners, corrupt/murderous politicians), then, in the end, *The Joshua Tree* was an overwhelmingly joyful experience, sonically and emotionally. So it's difficult, 30 years later, to hear it in any other way—which makes the remix collection a gift in its own right. It's an unexpected thrill to experience new emotions while hearing these songs, like the menace in the **Jacknife Lee** remix of "Bullet the Blue Sky," the melancholia in the **St Francis Hotel** refresh of "One Tree Hill" or the glacial, ambient beauty of **Daniel Lanois**' "Running to Stand Still" remix.

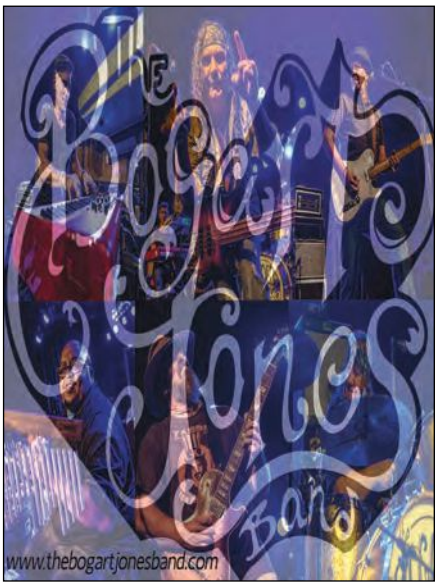
The live album, meanwhile, is pure adrenaline, with 27-year-old **Bono** captured in an era where he would still shred his voice, heard in the searing meld of "Exit" and "Gloria." The NYC crowd, which nearly rioted at the band's Radio City Music Hall gig three years earlier, maintains that energy, belting out the words to "New Year's Day" and "40," and chanting to "Party Girl." Harlem's **New Voices of Freedom** gospel choir join in for the highlight—a stirring performance of "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For." ***Wes Orshoski***

Jerry Garcia and Merl Saunders

GarciaLive Volume Nine: August 11th, 1974 Keystone Berkeley

ROUND

Jerry Garcia's idea of taking a break from the Grateful Dead was to play music with other people. Of the many aggregations with which he moonlighted, none is so revered as the various outings he made with organist **Merl Saunders** in the early '70s. Their relationship was particularly simpatico, and the small Keystone Berkeley was as close as they came to having a home base. This set features one of Garcia-Saunders' most stable and potent lineups, with bassist **John Kahn**, Dead drummer **Bill Kreutzmann** (the only surviving member) and saxophonist/flutist **Martin Fierro**, extending—as they were wont to do, for upward of 20 minutes or more—a fairly typical mix of tunes stemmed in R&B, blues, reggae and rock. Among the highlights is a rare workout on the Four Tops' 1973 Top-10 hit "Ain't No Woman (Like the One I've Got)," slowed to mid-tempo for plenty of individual expression and close interactivity. The quintet grooves along easily, gradually tucking in new themes until around the five-minute mark, when Garcia decides it's time to break loose, unleashing a brief but magnificent solo and then stepping out of the way for Saunders to do the same. A kicking take on Junior Parker's "Mystery Train," a sensitive reading of The Band's "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down" and an especially funky "The Harder They Come" (from the same-named Jimmy Cliff Jamaican film) are among the other peak moments of a keeper of a live show that demonstrates—not that proof was ever needed—Garcia's insatiable desire to keep pushing the envelope. ***Jeff Tamarkin***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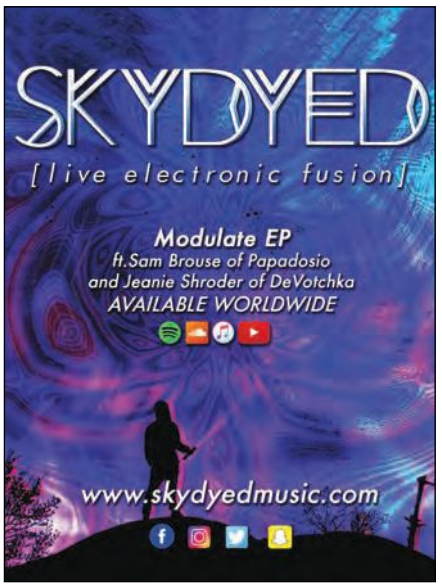
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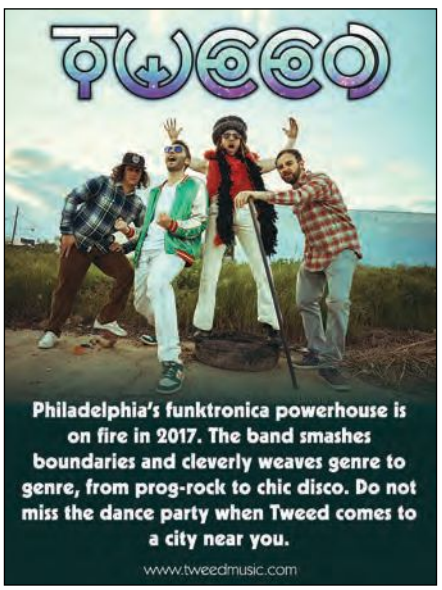
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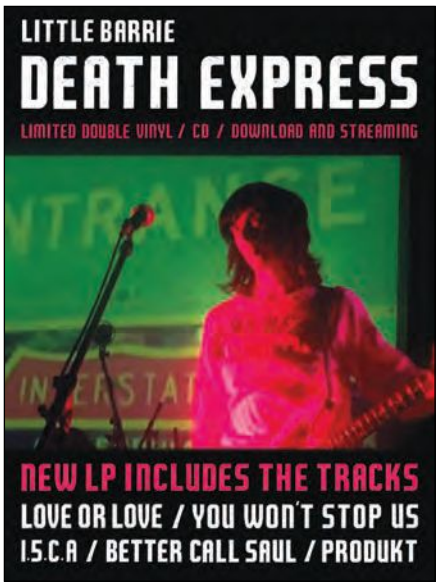
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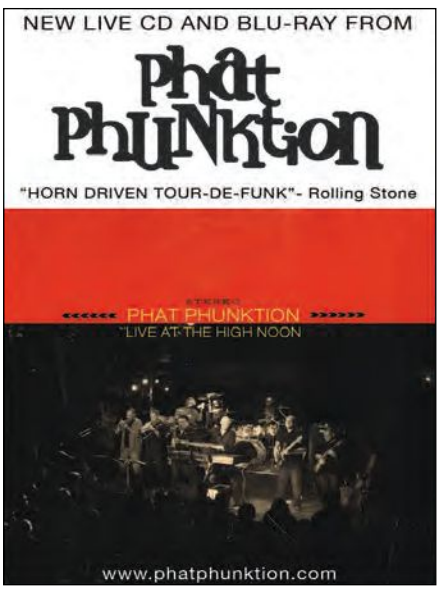

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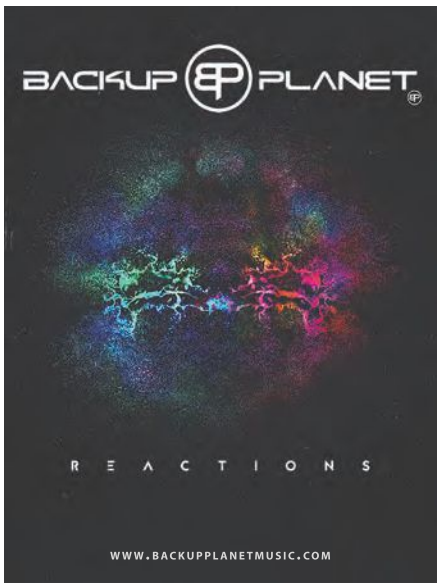
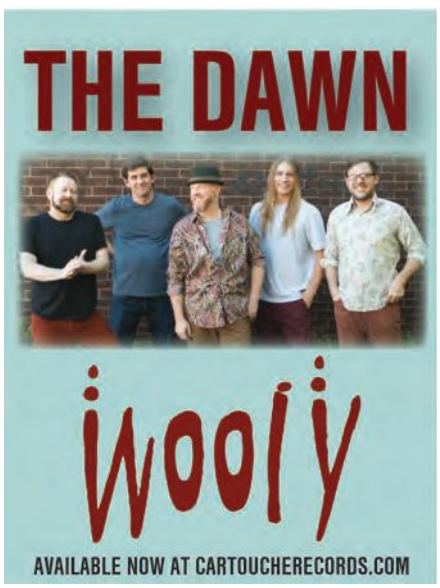




to show off this other stuff and have a real soulful sound. That's what I'm hoping for on a song like this.

IF YOU HAD A HEART TO BREAK

When I wrote it, this song was really more countrified than our version. I love traditional country music and I love sad songs. All singers like to sing sad songs, or at least I do. I liked putting a story together that people could relate to, and the whole line, "If you had a heart to break, I might find a tear to cry," is just funny. It's a little bit cheeky.

I didn't want it to be too much of a downer in presentation because it's not a real story; it's not autobiographical. I recently did some acoustic shows in San Francisco and that was the very first time that people had heard it. When I got to the line, "The last time I saw you, you called me handsome, now I know it's just because you couldn't remember my name"—You know, like, "Hey, handsome"—people really let out and laughed and I was like, "Oh, fuck, it worked." That was the stated purpose of the song and it worked. I was super enthused. As a songwriter, I had a devious smile on my face.

I wrote the lyrics at the studio pretty much. And by the time I get around to, "You've held the whip and you've held ransom in front of the idol you have defamed," I was like, "Come on. Don't a lot of guys feel like that? Don't a lot of women feel like that?" It doesn't have to be gender-specific to the tune. It felt good for those words to be scribbled down on the blank page in front of me.

GLOW

In my twisted mind, I was writing a British, John Martyn, Bert Jansch, John Renbourn, Davey Graham kind of song. Then I was lucky enough to go see the Tedeschi Trucks Band in Oakland, Calif., last year. When I was backstage, Derek introduced me to Alam Khan, who's the son of Ali Akbar Khan, the greatest sarod player of them all. There's Ravi Shankar on sitar and Ali Akbar Khan. Alam, his son, sat in with Derek and Susan that night. It was cool, he was a very nice dude. For 30-plus years, I've been interested in Indian classical music and Sufi music, all that kind of stuff. So I had this tune and I thought, "Maybe the sarod can be on this."

The afternoon when Alam came was one of my favorite sessions of all time. We set up the mics, we played the song a few times and that's what you hear. That's the second take. With the beautiful melodic content that he plays and the overall magic sound of that instrument, you can hear everyone playing to the vibes in the room. In that sense, it's a super magical little song.

Chris Robinson in his "barefoot" paradise onstage in 2016.

Dean Budnick

GOOD TO KNOW

I had the little verse riff, and that's all. It's so funny because, the first day of tour last year—Jeff's first show—we were setting up and soundchecking. I don't even remember where we were. But I just started playing the first riff, I didn't have a melody or anything. And then, Tony and Jeff just kind of picked up on it and Adam, who wasn't even set up yet, just started playing along. So I told everyone, "Keep playing, don't change" and I took my phone out and gathered a minute and a half of it. I didn't play it for anyone for the rest of the year. Then we got to the studio and, one morning, I pulled it out and was like, "This is the next one." That's all we had. So we started jamming on it.

We came up with the arrangement and recorded it without any vocal melody or anything. It was the very last thing that I wrote and sang actually. But once we were up and playing, the chorus just fell in, and then Adam came up with that middle section and the outro. If you allow the muse into your presence, she will pay off. When you are open and everyone wants to elevate this piece of music to something we're excited about, that's what the creative process feels like. It's like, at least for us, you're putting all this stuff together. It happens very fast.

For the lyrics, I just wanted to write a positive song. It's a sweet lollipop with a melancholy center because isn't life like that, really? It's funny, I always write that way. Duality is important to me. I think my writing has always had that to it. My darker songs and my sadder songs can't always be horrible. There has to be a light at the end of the tunnel. In my happy songs and in my songs of joy and more positive scenes, I always have to put a bit of the melancholy, even if it's just subliminal melancholy. That's my DJ name by the way, DJ Subliminal Melancholy.

it was—but the sessions still had a new, creative energy.

"I'd never met anyone who loves being in the studio more than me before Shawn," Granduciel says with a laugh. "I'll go 27 hours straight; he'll go 28. We ended up arriving at a sound over 9-10 months. He's a really malleable engineer and it was a great partnership." After the rest of the band returned home and Everett started working on other projects, Granduciel put the final touches on their tracks in his new studio space. "It was nice not to be beholden to a hard drive," he says. "It's crazy how much that can be a source of anxiety."

In certain ways, The War on Drugs vacillates between being a solo project and true *band*. Granduciel remains the group's primary creative force and mouthpiece in the studio, but his live ensemble has become an increasingly collaborative unit. When it came time to craft *A Deeper Understanding*, Granduciel was more open to involving the members of his touring band. He started by sending out a batch of 22 working demos, then boiled them down to 14 ready-to-record songs. They mixed 12 tunes and ended up including 10 on the record. "In the past, it was always like, 'Here are the 10 songs for the record. Hope they're good, that's all I got.'"

The meat of the album was recorded live too. "Thinking of a Place," "Pain," "Clean Living" and "Holding On," in particular, retain the concert energy that has catapulted The War on Drugs from art spaces to marquee stages like Coachella in recent years. Then, he touched them up with some overdubs.

"This is the first record where you can hear all of our personalities coming through in the music," Hartley adds. "We've played so many shows over the years. Adam recognized that it'd be a shame not to document that musical chemistry we've developed."

"There are politics involved in having a fully committed touring band when you start making a record," Granduciel adds. "You set up the way the band works, and then you go on the road for two years. I still wanted to adhere to what I'd always done—whatever was best for the moment, my inspiration—but there was a bit more rehearsal involved. And some of the songs I had written were recorded on the spot. Dave's always been an incredible, underrated bass player, but in the classic style of War on Drugs records, we're always too concerned with the moment to make sure that the bass is really dialed in. I wanted to showcase that more on this record."

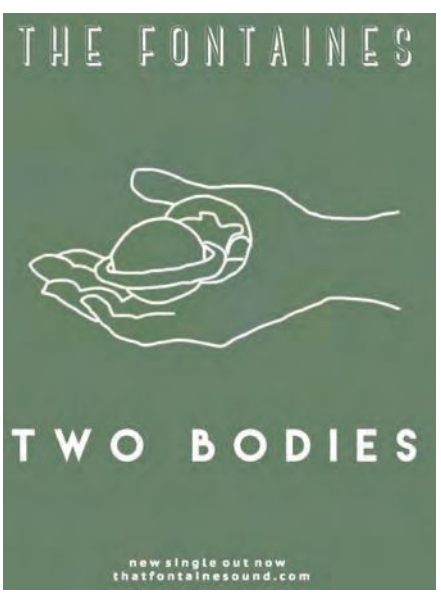
The final product is the group's biggest sounding and most expansive LP. It's atmospheric and egoless, but also grounded and heartfelt. Lead single "Holding On" builds on the roller-coaster thrill of their signature songs while the 11-minute "Thinking of a Place" is a dreamy, multifaceted groove-rock nugget that will likely grow into a showstopper. Lyrically, the album also digs deep into Granduciel's psyche; "Strangest Thing," at times, embraces the pensive sadness *A Deeper Understanding*'s title alludes to.

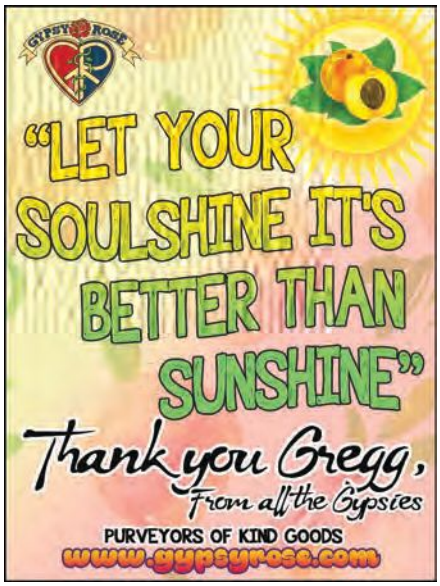
"That idea of coming off the road and that part of people's lives where things are really rapidly changing," Granduciel says, "I was trying to figure out my place in my own life and my place in my friends' lives and there was definitely a certain nostalgia for my life in Philadelphia." He says that he was listening to *The Ties That Bind* box set while working on the album and found inspiration in Bruce Springsteen's own "Saturn's return" questions while he was making *The River*.

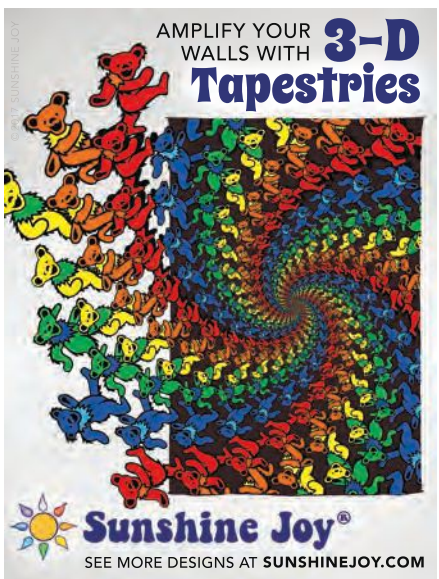
"It's that idea of looking at your friends growing up, becoming true adults, wondering when that'll happen for you and when you'll become the person you want to be—when you get to reveal yourself," he says. "You get so wrapped up in everything—the professional life, the day-to-dayness of keeping everything together. You gotta be something more, but, at the same time, I'm obsessed with working on music. So it's that thing where you're supposed to want something, but you feel this burning where it's like, 'Maybe this is just my *thing*.'"

Granduciel has also been inspired by Dylan's live approach and now feels that his songs only truly reveal themselves onstage. He can be less precious with them in concert and, one day, he can see The War on Drugs expanding in size to flesh out new sounds and sonic spaces under those hot stage lights. *A Deeper Understanding* may be more of an exclamation mark during a gradual build than a "Touch of Grey" boomerang back, but it's likely the record that will introduce the Philadelphia-bred outfit to a new, open-eared audience. And while the guitarist didn't try for a particularly different sound, he's excited to ride his current buzz wherever it takes him.

"You never grow out of looking back, thinking of yourself in a specific time—that's something you keep learning as you get older," he sums up. "As cheesy as it may sound, you try to make the most of your time in a specific moment of inspiration. It's still really hard for me to express myself, but that's what I wanted to address, and I hope I got to the heart of it. This is just a conversation that I'll be having with the music for maybe a couple of years. But that's why we put a cap on a set of songs and say their done. Eventually you're like, 'Well, this is just what I was talking about at this point in my life.'" R







as a merch guy, and he was with us for about a year. We were good friends and I remember Matt saying to me, "These guys [Mule] are thinking about going back out on the road. They would love for you to put something together."

Then Matt ended up working with RatDog and going into the Dead world. He knew I was a big Head and, a few years ago after Furthur was done and RatDog was playing at the Capitol Theatre, I said, "If there's ever another opportunity where you guys are going to put something together, please keep me in mind." I had just done a few shows with Gov't Mule when they were in a period of flux and I got the buzz to go on the road—the itch. I realized that selling lights and all the other stuff was just a secondary thing to why I got into this business. But at that point, Fare Thee Well was happening and Dead & Company wasn't even a twinkle in anybody's eyes.

That summer, I pushed hard on the festival market. I did Mountain Jam, Taste of Country, Solid Sound, Lockn' and multiple stages at Firefly, where I did site lighting with Chris Kuroda. That led to Magnaball and that epic surround lighting.

When September rolled around, I got a phone call from Derek Featherstone, an old friend who had done sound for Phil Lesh and other Grateful Dead-world offshoot bands. He's the vice president of UltraSound, which has been the Grateful Dead's audio company for 30 years, and is their technical director. He's the liaison between what the band wants and what production does. He said, "I know you're very busy with your job at BML, but I've got this opportunity for you running lights for Dead & Company." At that point in time, Dead & Company had those Halloween shows at Madison Square Garden booked. I didn't know it was actually going to be a *thing*.

They decided to do that second summer tour that solidified it—John [Mayer] and his playing ability. After Dead 50 there was such an outpouring of interest from the fan base. And probably a lot of people guessed that there was room for this again. I didn't know how it was going to play out, but those guys realized they were having such a good time onstage. The fan base really felt it. It just picked up from there and snowballed.

The music is very personal to me—there's a lesson there and it teaches kids right from wrong. It's not only in the music and the lyrics, but also in the lifestyle. It's important that young people come to these shows because the more people there are teaching positive reinforcement to the youth—and just showing basic kindness—the more it is going to make a more positive and amazing society all around.

I was pretty naive back in the early-'80s—I thought the Grateful Dead were a heavy-metal band because of the artwork that I'd seen. I listened to the Beastie Boys and Run DMC, then the Grateful Dead played in '83 and '84 in the Carrier Dome at Syracuse University—kids were camping out on the lawn of the university. I came from a divorced home, and I was immediately accepted into this Grateful Dead family. That was one of the turn-ons for me. I loved the music—but it was really the companionship of everyone around me and the acceptance. You could be the coolest jock in the world, prom king or the biggest geek, and you're probably going to get treated the same in that parking lot.

Do you have any day of show routines? My day is spent focusing my lighting rig, which is super challenging outdoors. Every venue is different, besides the stadiums, which all have the same size stage. But it's very easy for that system to get out of whack, focus-wise. I try to eat well, exercise a little bit, meditate and go through the setlist in my head. Unlike a lot of bands, I'm running 99 percent of the show completely live. We're not dealing with sequence and cue lists. I do have a few cue lists for some songs, but my file on that is basically a hybrid, meaning that there are 20 songs that I would call the "big hits," where I have some choreographed stuff and little tricks that I can go to. But, for the most part, the show is run live.

I usually don't talk to many people before the show or even during the set break—I try to think about where we're headed. With that being said, things always change at the drop of a dime with these guys; they start playing stuff that's not on the setlist, or wasn't played in soundcheck. My main thing is just being in the moment, and that's really what I tried to do a lot this summer. You go from being a fan to actually being part of it, and I'm just trying to enjoy every moment I have out there.

When does your day end? I'm lucky that my day ends after the band goes offstage. After so many years of working for so many different bands, and putting the rig up and taking it down, I've been granted the luxury of being able to walk away after the show. I can only make the analogy that I'm a painter and I have a palette, and on that palette, I'm going to pick from these songs. And it's not paint by numbers—there isn't a sketch of it up there already. They created that. That's really the essence of the Grateful Dead, being out there and challenging yourself, and keeping yourself open to the possibility that anything could happen. I try to do that the same way on my side. I know a lot of the people on the crew that get it, who are older fans and have tried it with their lives.

WHEN DROSTE STARTED GRIZZLY Bear in 2002, he was essentially working on a home-recording project under a nom de plume, but, slowly, it blossomed into a true band. Bear had lent a hand on his 2004 debut, *Horn of Plenty*, and Droste decided to form a proper group with the drummer and Taylor. Rossen, an old friend of Bear's from jazz camp, joined soon after and, as far back as *Veckatimest*, Grizzly Bear has increasingly become more egalitarian, more collaborative. The prioritization of personal lives, notwithstanding, the sound of *Painted Ruins* appears as unified as ever. There is an obvious and expected satisfaction that comes with any project's completion, but for Droste, *Painted Ruins* is particularly special.

"It's my favorite thing we've done," says the singer. "This one I sat with for so long; I feel there is no filler and I really love every song thoroughly."

Taylor points to the change in the creative process. He cites a maturity in the relationships and the resulting performance. Rossen believes the time off was crucial.

"I think it was healthy for us to have the freedom of coming back to this without any idea of what it has to be or when it has to happen," he says. "We switched up the roles a bit."

The band will hit the road heavily in support of the album, both nationally and abroad. The four-month trek will wrap in December back in Los Angeles with two nights at the Wiltern Theatre. Working out live arrangements for some of the new entries has been tricky.

"There's that little translation that has to happen," says Taylor. "And, there are always some songs that are not going to happen."

There is debate over how much a sense of place actually influences the work. They tracked past albums in such contrasting locales as the highborn shores of Cape Cod and the desert borderlands of Southwest Texas. *Ruins* carries little, if anything, that would distinguish it as a particularly Southern California effort.

Taylor says the effect of place is a popular question. "Hard to really say. I love living here. I'm happy. Maybe that influenced things."

Where the quartet bristles somewhat is in the characterization of their music as overtly melancholic and deep.

"Even if you are a sad person, making your music sad doesn't really do anything," argues Rossen. "Comedians can be some of the most depressed people in the world."

There are artists that prefer fighting the bad days with good-time feelings. Rossen confesses that sometimes Grizzly Bear prefers enlisting misery to wage the battle. Music, for them, is more interesting where there is friction.

"We're not a party band," says Droste.

"Relative to Skrillex, maybe we're a little bit downcast," says Rossen, smiling.

Their most recent records aimed to balance the emotional scales. It's the suggestion, though, of being considered a 'sad band' that elicits the strongest response.

"It bothers me that if it's not easy and instant, then it's sad and deep and moody," says Droste, who divorced his husband, interior designer Chad McPhail, during the five-year gap between albums. "Is sad a translation for having to think because this sounds different? Maybe you're going to get it on the fifth listen, as opposed to the first."

"It's depressing to think that people would say, 'This is confusing to me so now I'm sad,'" says Rossen. "I don't relate to characterizing any music as being purely happy or sad."

"Except for the song, 'Happy,'" counters Droste, shortly before the four members of Grizzly Bear step out of Terrible Studios, laughing together in the LA sun. "There's no debate." ❶

we're going to do 'St. Stephen' into 'Cinnamon and Lesbians.'" It gives me an opportunity to sing some stuff too. If I butcher somebody else's song, I don't feel as bad as butchering a Dead tune in this setting.

One night at the Bowl, [saxophonist] Stuart Bogie was there [and] Tommy started calling him Clarence. Tommy's a huge Springsteen fan and we had joked about doing "Born to Run." Oteil was like, "Huh?" Of course, being the monster that he is, he just made a real quick sketch of it and we threw that one out there.

That's also the fun thing about this band: Everybody's game for whatever. Again, we are paying respect to the source material, but not to the point where we can't play a Springsteen tune and just have fun. We're a Grateful Dead cover band, but we're also these five guys who feel like playing "Born to Run" sometimes. Maybe it's that thing where we take it seriously, but we don't take ourselves seriously. I think it's fun to see a band do that. When I'm in the crowd, it's cool to see a serious band, but it's also fun to see a band who's having fun while playing well. We have a unique opportunity here where, if we were to take it too seriously, it would be weird. It would be ignoring the fun that we're having. If we're up there laughing our asses off, or I mess up because I'm laughing at Tommy doing something, I'm all for that.

Have you been taken aback by the response from that very first show and all that's ensued?

It's been insane. We did that first gig, and again, we were doing one show. We learned enough music for one show, and we went out and played, and then we said, "That was really fun, right?" We didn't know what the hell just happened. We just went out and played and were loud. We were the loudest and fastest version of our band now, which is loud and fast at times. And as we turned the corner from the stairs to go up to the backstage, we were like, "Did people like that?" We didn't know.

And then, maybe a day or two later, somebody had posted a recording and people were talking about it, and we were like, "Wow, people really liked it." And then a week later, we're like, "Wow, people *really* liked it." It kept going like that, and it was already in the past for us. We had done the gig and that was it, but it just wouldn't go away.

So eventually, we decided we were going to do another gig, almost a year later, and then the call came: "You should do it at the Cap!" Of course, a band's second gig should be at the Capitol Theatre. [*Laughs*.]

All we're trying to do is play music with friends that we enjoy, and that people enjoy. The idea that keeps coming back to me—the biggest litmus test for this thing—is if we're having fun and the people out front are having fun. We check in once a year with the band and ask "Still fun?" If there's a year where everyone's not feeling it, then we'd be done and it would be fine.

That's the beauty of this thing: We didn't take years to build it; we didn't put in a lot of effort for it to become this thing and we have the very amazing ability to just appreciate it, which is rare. When the Duo was slugging it out trying to make it, we had fun; but, for me, personally, there was a lot of real life and desperation. I was like, "We have to make it; this band has to be successful. These songs that we wrote have to become something." Bustle was equally a no-intention thing.

There's this real beauty that we're given with this gig. We can play music we love while being able to appreciate how much fun we're having and still have those things to worry about in our other bands—those desperations are still there, with wanting to have your songcraft appreciated. But this isn't that. This is five guys having a blast in a room of other people hopefully having a good time. It's as simple as that. ❶

PETER HOOK

By MIKE GREENHAUS

PETER HOOK spent the first 30 years of his career with his eyes focused firmly forward and the past 10 reminding his fans just how important those decades of hard work were. As the co-founder of post-punk pioneers Joy Division, the bassist left an indelible mark on the indie-rock movement. And he inspired a second generation of musicians while churning out New Wave anthems with Joy Division's successors, New Order. When the band split up in 2007, Hook initially shifted his attention to DJing, but after paying tribute to Joy Division singer Ian Curtis around the 30th anniversary of his passing in 2010, he decided the time was right for a more formal retrospective. Since then, Hook has gradually worked his way through the Joy Division and New Order catalogs, song by song, recreating both bands' albums with the help of his new backing group the Light.

Though Bernard Sumner, Stephen Morris and Gillian Gilbert reformed New Order in 2011 and have released two new studio albums and a live record, Hook decided to strike out on his own. "I do miss the dynamic of a group and I do miss always going forward and writing," he says. "Not quite as much these days because of the way that the internet hooks everything up for musicians and journalists. As groups, we both suffer greatly by being poached by the internet."

Hook has also analyzed his work in print with *Unknown Pleasures: Inside Joy Division* and *Substance: Inside New Order*, both of which blend geeky, insider information into the framework of a traditional band bio. "I read Bernard's book and it offered no detail whatsoever—nothing about his songwriting craft, which I thought was such a shame because the guy was a fucking genius, mentally and musically," Hook says. "I suppose, in a way, he taught me how *not* to do a book on New Order."

New Order shied away from playing Joy Division's music for years and now you are recreating both catalogs live. Why did your perspective change?

When we were together as New Order, it felt OK not to celebrate anything to do with Joy Division. But once New Order split up, and we were on the outside looking in, it seemed quite odd not to celebrate Joy Division. I have no relationship with Stephen or Bernard, and haven't after 10 years. So, I thought, "Fuck it. I'll be on my own." I enlisted some friends, and we were looking for a way to celebrate the group without impersonating the group. My big beef with New Order now is that New Order shouldn't be pretending to be New Order.

It has been many years since you played these Joy Division songs. What struck you most about them when you took a deep dive into that corner of your career?

I wasn't aware that most people had only ever heard Joy Division on record. There are very few live tapes of Joy Division, and Joy Division were very different live. While Stephen wasn't that successful with New Order, he was certainly very successful with Joy Division and added a lot. I got the idea from Bobby Gillespie. Primal Scream played *Screamadelica*, and I thought, "That's the way to do it—play the LP in full!"

There was a lot of expectation, and there was a lot of negative chatter, shall we say. But once we showed that we were putting the right amount of passion, enthusiasm and reverence into what we were doing, we certainly won everybody over. And from Joy Division it seemed logical to do the same thing with New Order. We are celebrating the art of the long play and putting out these live records of our shows. I was brought up with fantastic long plays, from Velvet Underground's *Loaded* to Led Zeppelin.

You've toured the world with your band the Light, including many festival gigs. What's been the most surprising aspect of your recent journeys?

The interesting thing is that wherever we've gone to play, there's been a very young, enthusiastic audience. That's because New Order ignored the back catalog. I must admit, I did think it was crazy—Bernard and Stephen would just pay no heed to the back catalog. It was very frustrating, so I suppose I've gone off the other end. New Order did get really boring—we'd just play the same hits over and over again with no regard for some fantastic tracks. My ambition is to play every track that we've written and recorded, and I'm halfway there.

It's interesting: The very chemistry that makes you write great music as a group is usually the very chemistry that tears you apart. People still go and see New Order now and appreciate them for what they are, and then they come and see us and appreciate *us* for what *we* are. I was doing a gig in Berkeley, Calif., and New Order had played the week before. I simply asked, "Who went to see New Order" and nearly the whole audience put their hands up. So, you're sharing the fans. They're getting two bites—even if I don't agree with what [New Order] are doing and the way they market it.

[My former bandmates] certainly don't agree with what I'm doing. It's quite sad; it just shows how fucking stupid musicians can be. [*Laughs.*] All these legal fights with groups—we're all a bloody shame. We're idiots. But hearing the records live has been bit of a revelation to me, and it's been nice to have my son Jack play with the Light and hear how good he is.

Did retracing your steps through your biographies change the way you approached your material live?

I took for granted how good both groups are because, as a musician, I'm too close. When it comes to writing the books, you realize that throwing that stone in the pond certainly creates a lot of ripples. The Joy Division one was easy to write. The New Order one was much more difficult because the legal battle was still going on. It's what most musicians fight about—money and recognition.

When I was writing the book, I realized that New Order is a fantastic group who achieved so much together, and somehow it made the legal stuff seem even worse. You think, "You were together for 31 years, you changed the world of music in the way that you did with Joy Division, and here you are squabbling like little idiot children."

So, it made me realize what a huge band New Order was throughout the '80s, but there was a sad tinge to it because of this squabble. They insist that I'm not an important member of the group—never have been and should be treated accordingly—reducing my share from 25 percent to 1 percent. So every time they earn a dollar, I get a cent, which I don't think is fair.

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